MODERN SAINTS' PLAYS: A HISTORY OF THE GENRE

by

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STATEMENT OF DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

In medieval England, one of the most popular forms of drama was the saint's play. These plays depicted the lives, martyrdoms, and miracles of Catholic saints. After England's Reformation most of these scripts were lost due to destruction and censorship. In the nineteenth century, a combination of interest in medieval painting and architecture as well as the Oxford and Decadent movements led to a revival of Catholicism and hagiography. The second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century saw a proliferation of plays concerning Catholic saints. This project asserts that these plays constitute a new genre, which I name "modern saints' plays." I argue that these plays represent a new manifestation of medieval saints' plays, subject to the conventions of an international modern theater.

The project describes the history of saints' plays as they disappeared from England in the Renaissance and reappeared in the mid-nineteenth century. It analyzes Flaubert's *Temptation of St. Antony* and Wilde's *Salome* as examples of decadent saints' plays focusing on the suffering of the saint in a separate spiritual place. An analysis of Maeterlinck's *A Miracle of St. Anthony* (1904) provides a stylistic transition to the modern saints' plays written between the World Wars, which present saints in a critical dramaturgy.

The central chapters consider three responses to popular interest in Catholic saints by George Bernard Shaw, T.S. Eliot, and Gertrude Stein. The project defines Shaw's socio-religious critique in *Saint Joan*, T.S. Eliot's use of several dramatic traditions to convey his meditation on the conflict between religion and political secularism in *Murder in the Cathedral*, and Gertrude Stein's use of literary cubism in *Four Saints in Three Acts* to demythologize the impressions of saints that fill the modern world. Finally, a discussion of the privatization of religion reveals a new renaissance of saints' plays in the bountiful DVD offerings of such distributors as the Ignatius Press and the Catholic network, EWTN. I suggest that with this latest iteration of Catholic saints' plays, the Church attempts to regain control over the spiritual image of saints in a desecularization of the twenty-first century.

I dedicate this dissertation to Sister Aurelia Joseph and Mr. Christopher Wibberly, formerly of St. James School in Redondo Beach, CA. Without their relentless dedication to grammar tutelage I never could have come so far.

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CHAPTER I

SAINTS AND SAINTS' PLAYS— THE ENDURANCE OF ANTIQUITY

"It is very clear from the evidence that subsequently [to 1110 AD] there was a great flourishing of this genre up to the time of the Reformation. Yet very little remains of what was then a healthy tradition of playing the lives and sufferings of the saints on the medieval stage." (Clifford Davidson, "Middle English Saint Play," 1986)

"Since Dryden's day no important attempt has been made to picture saints' lives on the English stage." –(Gordon Hall Gerould, *Saints' Legends*, 1916)

How mysterious it is that saints' plays, the most popular dramatic form of the English Middle Ages, should have been lost to such a degree that we cannot know with any certainty what it was like or even the extent of its popularity. While none but two English saints' plays have been preserved, we know from records—festival lists, money paid to actors, orders for costumes, props, and other such artifacts—that "at least thirty-eight different saints had at least sixty-six different plays written about them," and that is "merely the extant tip of an iceberg" (Wasson 241-242). Split roughly into three groups—conversion narratives, miracle stories, and martyrdoms—the most prevalent topic of medieval saints' plays must have been the miraculous stories of suffering ending in the death of martyrs such as SS. Catherine, Thomas Becket, Andrew, Eustace, Magnus, Lawrence, Susana, James, Stephen, Denis, and Christina. And yet not a single English play of this type survived the Reformation. Scholars tell us that, judging by the few remaining English and Cornish saints' plays, as well as continental manuscripts, "the

protagonists of the saint plays, unlike those of the moralities, are not only historical but special rather than ordinary representatives of everyman. The plays tend to emphasize the unique qualities of the protagonists…the miracles the saints perform are spectacular, their sufferings heroic, their lives exemplary rather than ordinary" (Wasson 243-244). The complexity of these plays' plots and the heroism of their protagonists have influenced English drama from medieval to postmodern.

The twentieth-century revival of the Canterbury Festival, the enduring popularity of the Oberammergau Passion Play, and the seemingly uncountable number of popular films about Joan of Arc converge to augment the mystery surrounding a surprising lack of scholarship on saints' plays in the twentieth century. The plays themselves did not lack popularity either then or in the last hundred years, and while scholarship on individual plays has been published, no study on saints' plays as a modern genre exists. The foremost scholar on medieval English saints' plays, Clifford Davidson, sheds light on the significance of saints' plays in the development of English drama, claiming "the miracle or saint play may even have been the most important genre of the repertoire of the English medieval stage" (Davidson "Middle English Saint Play" 31). This medieval religious drama underwent a great revival in the twentieth century, such that "today performances of the mystery plays are enjoyed by audiences throughout England and other countries, but less than four decades ago they were almost totally unknown on the English stage" (Elliott vii). These confirmations of the renewed popularity of hagiographic drama in the twentieth century, both miracles and mysteries, makes even more confounding the fact that no major analysis or characterization of English saints' plays written in the twentieth century exists. If Davidson calls the saints' plays of the

Middle Ages "a neglected genre" (*Saint Play in Medieval Europe* 9), so much more neglected are the group of modern saints' plays[1] written in the early twentieth century, which, until now, remained unnamed. Perhaps their slow emergence from two centuries of dramatic silence is to blame. As the quotation from Gordon Gerould above indicates, after the time of Dryden, saints' plays disappeared from the English stage and didn't reappear until the end of the nineteenth century.

In 1935, T.S. Eliot lamented, "The whole of modern literature is corrupted by what I call Secularism, that is simply unaware of, simply cannot understand the meaning of, the primacy of the supernatural over natural life" (Eliot, "Religion and Literature" 104-105). As Eliot notes, a ubiquitous secularism has become associated with modern art and literature, beginning as early as the sixteenth century when the romance and adventure of plays such as Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* replaced the miracle and morality plays of the cycles and *Everyman*. It was inevitable that drama would secularize somewhat when its sponsors changed from exclusively ecclesiastic to guilds and civic communities in the thirteenth century. The near complete transformation of religious drama into tragedy, romance, and history was harder to predict. Yet a new religiosity crept back into art and literature in the nineteenth century, often featuring religious imagery from myths and legends, including the Pre-Raphaelite paintings of the Annunciation and Mary Magdalene, Wagner's Siegfried, and the myriad Salome paintings and narratives by artists such as Moreau, Regnault, Mucha, Flaubert,

[1] Although Clifford Davidson sometimes uses the terms "saint play" and "saint plays," a number of other prominent scholars of medieval drama refer to this type of play as a "saint's play," the plural being "saints' plays." For this manuscript, I have elected to use the possessive form because it appears in Karl Young's *Drama of the Medieval Church*, David Bevington's *Medieval Drama,* and Gordon Gerould's *Saints' Legends*. Thus, I have named the modern genre "modern saints' plays."

Wilde, and Mallarmé. But the avant garde focus on new forms in poetry, theater, and painting, the naturalism of Zola, realism of Ibsen and O'Neill, and cynicism of Shaw all diminished the prominence of divine power as a prime motivator in British and American literature at the beginning of the twentieth century. Despite the prominent conversions of T.S. Eliot and C.S. Lewis in the period, the secularism of Hemingway, Stein, Lawrence, and even Joyce[2] typifies the turn from supernatural intervention in much of this period. Such a turn makes the early twentieth century an unlikely place to look for the emergence of a new religious heroism or saintliness. And yet it hosted many dramatic works featuring Catholic saints, including a revival of medieval pageants and mystery plays as well as several new plays such as George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*, T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, and Gertrude Stein's *Four Saints in Three Acts*. Reacting to a nineteenth-century fascination with the sincerity and isolation of the early martyrs and medieval ascetics, surprisingly, several prominent modernist authors wrote plays about Catholic saints between the World Wars. These plays constitute a new manifestation of the saints' plays popular at religious feasts and festivals of the Middle Ages, and I call them "modern saints' plays."

When Clifford Davidson refers to T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) as a "modern saint's play" (Davidson, "T.S. Eliot" 125), he has good reason to do so. Like its medieval predecessors, the verse play was commissioned by a bishop to be performed on the grounds of a cathedral at a seasonal festival. Its form is emphatically modernized, employing a variety of dramatic influences other than those saints' plays that had

[2] Although Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* includes a great representation of Catholicism, Stephen's choice to abandon the church marks the rest of Joyce's work. The image of religion in Ulysses is cynical to say the least, and the trajectory of religion in Joyce's body of work mimics the very picture of rising secularism I describe here.

disappeared from English stages for nearly three centuries. Davidson makes the apparent link between Eliot's play and the medieval genre partly because of Eliot's own efforts to link the form and moral of his play to traditional religious drama ("*Murder in the Cathedral* and the Saint Play Tradition" 123). If we consider modern saints' plays as a genre, as this study argues for, one should also include Flaubert's *Temptation of St. Antony* (1856, 1874), Maeterlinck's *Miracle of St. Anthony* (~1904) and *Mary Magdalene* (1910), Shaw's *Saint Joan* (1923), Stein's *Four Saints in Three Acts (1934),* and Anouilh's *The Lark* (1952) and *Becket* (1959) as shaping that modern genre. This project considers these plays as constituents in a genre that until now has been left undefined. Categorizing them "modern saints' plays," this project explains the history of a genre that reacts to a modern conceptualization of medieval saints. As a whole, modern saints' plays move on from the conversions and passions of medieval saints' plays, taking on modern social criticism and attempting to uncover the real saints beneath centuries of legend.

Taken together as a genre, these French, Belgian, British, and American plays illustrate popular attitudes toward saints from the late Victorian period on, the French and Belgian works having a strong influence on artistic and literary movements in Britain and the US. Like medieval saints' plays, these dramas include depictions of portions of saints' lives or miracles performed by the saints (sometimes posthumously). Differences between these plays and their medieval ancestors include the production realities of commercial, secular theaters, far removed from the public platforms of the medieval churchyard or street. These new productions belong to artists and theaters rather than guilds and community groups. However, just as the arc of a medieval cycle illustrates a

"history of salvation" (King 316), from the first sin to the redemptive power of the resurrection, modern saints' plays, especially those written between the World Wars, each illustrate a concept of saintliness—a path not just to salvation, but to religious superstardom.

The secularizing effect of banning religious drama in the English Reformation resulted in nearly three centuries without saints' plays, except in unscripted mummers' performances. After further secularization in the Enlightenment and Romantic periods, new images of saints emerged in paintings, poems, lives, and dramas, idealized and often eroticized, suffering in an isolated, spiritual place. Following the typology of the lives of the Desert Fathers, Decadent saints' plays of the late nineteenth century contrasted the saints' purity with opulent surroundings, producing an image of saintliness composed of an innocent and sincere will persevering through the torments of alluring vices. Flaubert's *The Temptation of Saint Antony* (1856, 1874) provides the clearest example of this type of saint's play. While authors wrote these plays for secular stages and readers, the image of the Catholic saint remained traditional, maintaining perfect faith and suffering for their pure love of Christ.

After the turn of the twentieth century, modern saints' plays evolved to depict heroes whose unique visions allow them to see beyond the conventions and corruption of modern life, taking controversial political stands. They attain saintly perfection by submitting themselves to their visions of God's perfect will. In their reaction to idealized versions of sainthood, dramatists between the World Wars used their saints' plays in a social commentary often critical of the church, the state, and the traditions in which saints are venerated. In a reflexive gesture, the authors of these plays appear to inscribe

themselves as saints. They evolve a concept of "universal saintliness," originally described by William James in *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). While James considers a set of saintly ideals that exist across religions and cultures, the authors of modern saints' plays between the World Wars reconsider the social significance of Catholic saints. Shaw sees Joan of Arc as a heretical individualist, Eliot finds Thomas of Canterbury to be an advocate of peaceful resistance, and Stein recognizes Spanish saints as a communion of stories and statues living in a cultural, linguistic, and artistic imagination.

Between the World Wars, plays by George Bernard Shaw, T.S. Eliot, and Gertrude Stein each reacted to the revival of interest in saints offered by popular nineteenth-century medievalism. Shaw's *Saint Joan*, presented via social realism, provides a progressive saint whose heroic vision, brought on either by divinity or mental instability, would lead her peers to a future where individualism trumps social and religious tradition. Shaw locates her saintliness in her forward thinking, which would promote nationalism before it existed and defend the right of women to wear pants before such a practice was considered moral. While these issues are not particularly religious, Joan's belief that her visions came from God made her a martyr for them. In Shaw's concept of saintliness, it is necessary for Joan to advocate heretical ideas and be killed for them in order to show her superhuman faithfulness, which would prove in the end to be saintly, even to the Catholic Church that originally condemned her.

Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* attempts to reunite religion and society, continuing a tradition of collaboration between church and artist. He depicts a saint whose spiritual sacrifice maintains its relevance in the face of modern secularism. Eliot

made no secret of the fact that he was opposed "to the compartmentalization of life in general, to the sharp division between our religious and ordinary life" (Eliot, "Religious Drama: Medieval and Modern" 10). Eliot took the historical moment in hand, accepting a commission by Bishop George Bell, Dean of Canterbury, to write a verse play for the Canterbury Festival of 1935. His saint, Thomas Becket, martyrs himself rather than privilege the secular power of the king over the power of the church, denying the advice of knights, priests, and townswomen. He also struggles with the decision each human must make for him or herself: the choice to act for the benefit of himself or to act for the glory of God. Through this struggle, Eliot's saint remains faithful to his unpopular decision to act on behalf of God. Like Shaw's Joan, Eliot's Thomas is certain he knows God's will, and makes the ultimate sacrifice in order to fulfill it. This strength and clarity of vision marks the saintliness of both protagonists.

Finally, Stein's libretto, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, exemplifies the avant-garde notion that saints, as cultural heroes, live in art—as much a part of our current consciousness as at any time in the past. Her script includes a dizzying number of saints, some named, some not, some actual canonized saints, some whose names only seem like they could be saints' names. She provides images of saints in porcelain figurines, statues silhouetted against the sky, and circulating like so many pigeons on the grass. She uses multiple iterations of the same scene and act numbers, as well as questions such as, "How many scenes are there in it?" in order to point to the literary elements of saints lives. She illustrates the fact that saints exist for us in art and that they act like cubist artists, dedicated to their work of illustrating the world according to their own special vision. In

this third example, saintliness again requires a special vision of the world and the strength to continue portraying that vision to its people.

The Cult of the Saints

The cult of the saints in late antiquity marked a revolution in the beliefs and praxis of Christianity. The dead body, once a vestige of defilement separating the human world from the divine, came to mark a place of glory, a meeting of heaven and earth, in the holy presence of the saint. The translation of bones was not revolutionary, but their movement in respect to the living rather than the soul of the dead was. A re-internment of bones a year after death in a type of family crypt called an ossuary was common in Talmudic times, 70-500 ACE (Kashani). Generally, this translation of bones allowed the dead to lie with their ancestors. The cult of the martyrs or saints not only moved bones and relics, but considered them a locus of a saint's spiritual presence, which blessed those who came to venerate them, making the translation of bones specifically designed for the good of the pilgrim rather than the saint. Pilgrims journeyed to experience the healing miracles of the saints' presence at their tombs. They sought relief from suffering, associated with the martyrs' superhuman ability to withstand persecution through God's intervention. Peter Brown describes this enmeshing of death and miracles:

> The original death of the martyr, and even the long, drawn out dying of the confessor and the ascetic, was vibrant with the miraculous suppression of suffering…behind the now-tranquil face of the martyr there lay potent memories of a process by which a body shattered by drawn-out pain had once been enabled by God's power to retain its integrity. (P. Brown 80)

Thus the special relationship of the saint to God's healing power sanctified the area around his or her body on earth, affecting a meeting of heaven and earth hitherto unimaginable. Festivals that included readings of the passion of the saint strengthened

the healing presence, bringing about miracles for which the pilgrims made long journeys. "Coinciding as it did with the high point of the saint's festival, the reading of the *passio* gave a vivid momentary face to the *praesentia* of the saint" (P. Brown 82). By invoking this holy presence of the saint, "Christian communities of the Western Mediterranean turned the celebration of the memory of the martyrs into a reassuring scenario by which unambiguously good power, associated with the amnesty of God and the *praesentia* of the martyr overcame the ever-lurking presence of evil power" (P. Brown 101). Thus, the narratives of saints' miracles and death were associated with the cult of the saints from the very beginning. Just as the celebration of Mass brings about Christ's presence in the Eucharist, the reading of the saint's passion brought about a uniting of the Christian community with the redemptive and healing powers of the saint's presence, which also dwelt in Heaven with God. With the re-introduction of European drama in the twelfth century, the essence of these dramatic readings translated to plays about the lives and miracles of the saints.

The festivals and celebrations associated with saints had a great impact on the development of the Christian calendar, which governed the activity and enterprise of the Western world in the Middle Ages—and still does in many ways. The reliance of our commercial industries on a culture committed to purchasing gifts at Christmastime proceeds from this calendar, and the proximity of the feasts of St. Nicholas and St. Stephen. The Catholic Church traditionally observes May as Mary's month, begun on May Day with a festival of the Blessed Virgin, called a May crowning, and has long celebrated "Mothering Sunday" on the fourth Sunday of Lent. While these practices may be confined to the Catholic community, American retailers have come increasingly to

depend on the ubiquity of a celebration of mothers on the second Sunday of May. Even the capitalistic and nationalistic maintenance of St. Valentine's Day and St. Patrick's Day attests to the enduring impact of a medieval Catholic veneration of saints on contemporary culture. So while modern secularity maintains a tenuous relationship with Catholic saints, its capitalism relies on their precedence nonetheless. Modern saints' plays of the early twentieth century uncover these saints, challenging secular audiences to consider their own relation to the religious framework that underlies their culture.

Saints' Plays

A reading of the saints' stories played a vital role in the festivals of late antiquity when theater had been rejected as a vestige of pagan spectacle. These readings foreshadowed the popularity of plays concerning saints after the re-emergence of Western drama in the early Middle Ages. The beginning of this new drama manifested itself in liturgical verses embellished for Easter masses, especially the "visitatio sepulchri"—the scene in which Mary Magdalene finds Jesus's tomb empty. Accounts vary in the four canonical gospels, but each includes the visit to the tomb by Mary Magdalene, after which she and, in some versions, the people with her see Jesus, angels, or a man who speaks to them, and they become the first to tell Peter and the Apostles of the good news of Christ's resurrection. The application of multiple voices in the singing of this scene in the Easter Gospel produced the same dramatic quality as adding voices to the dithyrambs of ancient Greece. Multiple scenes in various liturgies were dramatized, followed by scenes from the Old Testament, eventually becoming too complex and proving too much of a spectacle for the church building. Stages moved outside church walls on scaffolds to be used during festivals, and the plays themselves were sponsored

by various groups of clergy, guilds, and community members. Thus began the medieval saint's play, usually performed in conjunction with other miracle, mystery, and morality plays.

Any definition of the term "saint play" or "saint's play" is tenuous, as only three saints' plays in English survived the Reformation. Church and guild records provide us with the knowledge that these plays flourished throughout the Middle Ages, the earliest record naming 1110 as the year of a production featuring Catherine of Alexandria (Davidson, "Middle English Saint Play" 31). Finding their origins in medieval miracle or mystery plays, saints' plays evolved simultaneously with the Corpus Christi Cycles (Young 307), which depicted scenes from the Bible, often beginning with Adam and Eve, continuing through appearances of the resurrected Christ. Karl Young defines a saint's play as "the dramatization of a legend setting forth the life or martyrdom or miracles of a saint" (Young 307). This definition ranges very broadly as it suggests that the play might contain the story of the saint's conversion, perfection, or any other scene from the saint's life, death, or afterlife, as plays of the miracles of St. Nicholas often depict. Some short Biblical narratives such as the death of John the Baptist or the conversion of Saint Paul, although they arise from scripture, fit Young's "legendary" derivation because a millennium of embellishment and cultural addition foregrounds the plays. Additions such as Mary Magdalene's journey to convert the King of Marseilles occupy large portions of the plays. The narrative characteristics of medieval saints' plays devoted to such stories do not attempt to retell the story in scripture. Rather, they present characters, situations, and details that never appear in scriptural accounts. In the Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul*, one scene depicts high priests of Jerusalem commissioning Saul to arrest

Christians in Damascus while another scene has Belial, a "devil," conspiring with another devil, Mercury, to bring about Paul's death for turning against them to God (Bevington 679). These scenes clearly spring from legends that have built up around the Biblical accounts and allow these otherwise scriptural themes to be categorized as saints' plays.

In England, the term "saints' plays" has been applied most commonly to miracle (and/or mystery) plays of the late middle ages concerning the conversion of Saint Paul, the miracles of Saint Nicholas, and the life of Mary Magdalene (Davidson, *Saint Play in Medieval Europe* 4-6). These have become regular canonical examples of medieval saints' plays as few other original manuscripts exist (Bevington 661-663). While not a single manuscript of a medieval play about Thomas Becket or Catherine of Alexandria survived the Reformation in England, biographies, histories, and records of the middle ages leave no doubt as to the prevalence of saints' plays produced for festivals in honor of patron saints such as Thomas Becket (Davidson, "Middle English Saint Play" 53). These plays, celebrating the miracles and martyrdom of patron saints like Thomas of Canterbury, were clearly inspired by the cult of the saints (Davidson, *Saint Play in Medieval Europe* 2), beginning as early as 155 AD with the collection and veneration of St. Polycarp's relics (Davidson, *Saint Play in Medieval Europe* 2). They functioned to bring the blessings of the saints on the communities that celebrated them and begged their intercession with God.

While authors of modern saints' plays certainly do not intended to invoke the blessings of the saints themselves, modern saints plays invoke the stories of saints to instruct their audiences on contemporary themes. For instance, Shaw's preface to *Saint Joan* makes clear his intentions of revealing Joan's heroic individualism to a community

that has put great emphasis on tradition: "When Joan maintained her own ways she claimed, like Job, that there was not only God and the Church to be considered, but the Word made Flesh: that is, the unaveraged individual" (Shaw). In *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot impresses his audience with the significance of choice—the choice to do the right thing for the right reasons—in contemporary moral dilemmas. At the apex of tension in the play Thomas must consider whether he acts for God or desires the glory of martyrdom for himself: "The last temptation is the greatest treason:/ To do the right deed for the wrong reason" (*Murder in the Cathedral* 44). Eliot uses Thomas as a mirror for the audience, suggesting that they consider the motivation for their own actions. Stein dazzles her audience with an overwhelming number of saints permeating contemporary culture and art in her libretto *Four Saints in Three Acts*. She suggests that modern artists live the lives of saints, committed to bringing their divine visions to light. She would lead her audiences to see that greater depictions of the world lay in art rather than conventional sight. Though these plays do not necessarily venerate their subjects, they do employ their heroic figures to improve and enlighten the community.

Saints' Legends

Jacobus de Voragine made a lasting contribution to the continuing cult of the saints in the mid 13th century, compiling a nearly exhaustive collection of saints' lives and legends in the *Legenda Aurea* (Golden Legend). This comprehensive group of legends continued to provide material for the crafting of saints' plays from medieval to modern times. Accounts in the *Legenda Aurea* are characterized by a particular historicity mixed with supernatural legend. The chapters are mainly called the "History of Saint…" or the "Life of Saint…" Without flourish, the legends present the most

extraordinary characteristics and events in the lives of saints. For example, the "Life of S. Nicholas" begins with his birth:

> Then the first day that he was washed and bained, he addressed him right up in the bason, and he would not take the breast nor the pap but once on the Wednesday and once on the Friday, and in his young age he eschewed the plays and japes of other young children. (Voragine)

This passage reveals the hyperbolic or supernatural characteristics with which the character of St. Nicholas is imbued, as are most other saints in the *Legenda Aurea*. Voragine's saints are entirely good and godly, either from birth or after a conversion experience. In melodramatic fashion, their complete goodness allows them to be contrasted with devils, often representatives of pagan gods. A passage describing a devil of Diana in the legend of St. Nicholas reads:

> Then the devil was angry and wroth against him, and made an oil that burned, against nature, in water, and burned stones also. And then he transformed him in the guise of a religious woman, and put him in a little boat, and encountered pilgrims that sailed in the sea towards this holy saint, and areasoned them thus, and said: I would fain go to this holy man [Nicholas], but I may not, wherefore I pray you to bear this oil into his church, and for the remembrance of me, that ye anoint the walls of the hall; and anon he vanished away. (Voragine)

The devil's treachery here threatens to destroy Nicholas and his church, until Nicholas' spiritual superiority saves them all. The infallible nature of the saints' ability to manifest the goodness of God on earth permeates the Legend, providing the saints with fearlessness in the face of death and persecution. Their heroism leads them to single-minded acts similar to the heroes of classical epic.

Achilles, Hercules, and Aeneas struggle to recognize and fulfill the fate determined by their gods, exhibiting prowess over lesser beings. They fight with a diluted godly power, being demigods themselves, as well as with the help of their pantheon of gods. Christian saints in the *Golden Legend* fight with the full power of God

directed through them, able to overcome all enemies. According to Saint Augustine, the superior power of the Christian saints in vanquishing demons of the pagan world makes them worthy of the title "heroes":

> For this name came from Juno, and therefore one of her sons (I know not which) was called Heros, the mystery being that Juno was Queen of the air where the heroes (the well-deserving) should dwell with the demons. But ours (if we might use the word) should be called so, for a contrary reason, namely, not for dwelling with the demons in the air but for conquering those demons, those aerial powers, and in them, all that is called Juno: whom it was not for nothing, that the poets made so envious, and such an opposite to good men being defied for their virtue…our Heroes (if I may say so) conquer not Hera by humble gifts but by divine virtues. Surely Scipio deserved the name African[us] rather for conquering Africa, than for begging or buying his honor of his foes…Godly men do expel the aerial powers, opposing them from their possession by exorcisms, not by pacification: and break their temptations by prayer, not unto them but unto God, against them. For they conquer nor chain no man but by the fellowship of sin. So that His name that took on Him humanity, and lived without sin, confounds them utterly. (Augustine 146-147)

In this passage, Augustine describes the "aerial powers" that exist throughout the *Golden Legend*, tempting and influencing humanity. An understanding of the worldview that includes such pervasive devils and demons that tempt humanity to worldly power and sin is integral to understanding the universe of medieval saints' plays and its reprisal in modern saints' plays.

Saints as Heroic Supermen

Since the Epic of Gilgamesh was written 4,000 years ago, humans have imagined the supermen who will advance human civilization, understanding, and consciousness. Whether they are demigods, enlightened humans, or legendary fabrications, their ideas affect the world's understanding of itself and propel humanity into new eras. In the nineteenth century, Wagner imagined his hero Siegfried, the primal man, as returning humanity to a cleaner, purer consciousness (L. Brown, "Wagner" para. 7). Later,

Nietzsche augmented Wagner's hero, imagining his own *Übermensch* not only as a man empowered by his primal instincts, but as one whose active fervor in leaving behind the confines of man's attachment to conventional morality would forge new and greater possibilities for humanity (L. Brown, "Nietzsche" para. 2). In the twentieth century, Shaw adds to his superman a dimension of practicality. Free of heroic illusions, the Shavian superman has, above all else, "the ability to get things done" (L. Brown, "Shaw" para. 8). His or her common sense leads the superman to surpass conventional wisdom and lead humanity to new realms of understanding, as when Joan of Arc shrugged off conventional women's dress in favor of practical military clothing that allowed her to move in battle and protected her against rape.

The protagonists of medieval and modern saints' plays embody moral and religious heroism, also called heroic virtue. They stand out from ordinary humans because the miracles that affect their lives and their faithfulness in suffering seem only possible through supernatural intervention. For example, when Catherine of Alexandria, a fourth-century martyr, is shown the Catherine wheel, it is miraculously destroyed before it can be used to torture and kill her, and she is finally beheaded for her faithfulness to Christianity and for achieving the conversion of over two hundred people. The Catholic Church requires attributes of heroic virtue and evidence of miracles in the lives of its canonized saints. However, Christian groups have not always defined saints in the same way. For Luther and low-church Protestants, including such nineteenth-century inventions as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the term refers to a community of faithful Christians. The English Standard Version of the Bible uses the word "saints" to refer to groups not only of early Christians addressed in the New

Testament, but faithful Old Testament Jews as well. Modern audiences' perception of saints has been shaped through an internalization of this post-Reformation concept. They experience a greater distance from saints than their medieval counterparts due to their greater education and because the mythologizing effects of legend make them even more fantastic seven hundred years later. The incongruous image of a heroic saint on a realistic modern stage brings contemporary society into critical relief.

Saints and Social Critique

One example of the social critique within modern saints' plays is found in the *Miracle of Saint Anthony* by Flemish symbolist Maurice Maeterlinck. Published in its only authorized form in one act in 1918, it was originally written just before the war but was produced only after the Treaty of Versailles. Finished three decades earlier, Flaubert's *Temptations of Saint Antony* concerns Antony the Great or Antony of Egypt, one of the Desert Fathers. These fourth-century ascetics wandered the deserts of Egypt praying for humanity and fighting demonic apparitions. The practices of the desert saints formed the basis for the monastic and cloistered orders. The novels of decadence in the nineteenth century took the type of these desert saints, suffering in a self-imposed exile. Although their protagonists found dissatisfaction in the artificial worlds they built in their restreats, desert saints found a sacrificial satisfaction in purifying themselves of the corruption of the world. Antony's long suffering through asceticism and temptation made him a perfect candidate for decadent portrayal in the nineteenth century. The later narrative by Maeterlinck concerns a current day apparition of St. Anthony of Padua, a thirteenth-century Franciscan friar who answers a pious supplicant's prayers. Complicating the popular medievalism of the nineteenth century, modern saints' plays

between the World Wars tend to feature later medieval saints rather than the early martyrs or Desert Fathers as medieval saints' plays did. Instead they included saints like Anthony of Padua, the fifteenth-century Joan of Arc and Ignatius Loyola, and sixteenth-century Theresa of Avila. The later saints relate to a more complex world of national politics and Counter-Reformation.

Maeterlinck's play draws on traditional plays of St. Nicholas, often short, scripted dramas performed by children during Advent. These short dramas concern a character or group of characters saved from impending trouble by the intervention of the spirit of St. Nicholas, a fourth-century Greek saint. *A Legend of Saint Nicholas,* "a miracle play of olden Italy" by Beulah Marie Dix published in 1914, tells the story of a rich boy who, due to his carelessness, is captured and made the slave of a powerful sultan (Dix 1-49). His true penitence and sincere prayers to Saint Nicholas convince the saint to save him and return him to the house of his parents. Answering a likewise heartfelt prayer, Maeterlinck's Saint Anthony comes to fulfill the prayers of an old servant to the even older Mademoiselle Hortense, who has lain dead three days. The austerities of his asceticism make him appear as a beggar to Hortense's family, though he explains that he has come "to bring her back to life." Within moments, he is asked if bringing the woman back to life will affect the large inheritance left to Hortense's heirs. The issue of the inheritance becomes the central issue of the play as Anthony raises Hortense and is subsequently abused and taken out of the house by police. Even Hortense, in her groggy awakening, admonishes Anthony, believing him to be a beggar dirtying her home. The opposition of Anthony's good will and the family's ironic reactions single him out as much as his shabby and "muddied" clothes. Having descended from Paradise and being

chased from the home of his once devout supplicant, Anthony is alienated in literal, objective ways by the community he has come to appease.

The humor of the piece echoes the complex humor of Shaw's plays, such as *Arms and the Man* (1894), in which an escaped soldier sojourns in the bower of a young maiden whose affections he wins despite the greater wealth of another suitor favored by her family. St. Anthony's alienation in *The Miracle of Saint Anthony* is crystallized in the characters' uniform preference for palpable material gain over the uncertainty of moral virtue. Maeterlinck's Anthony is forcibly rejected by the community rather than victorious as Shaw's hero in *Arms and the Man* or Flaubert's earlier St. Antony. And those responsible for rejecting him, rather than aerial demons, are participants in a society that values the gold of their inheritance over the life of their family member (or the miracle that would bring her back to life). The resulting play employs a version of medievalism that clearly scrutinizes modern morality, rather than providing an idealized contrast to it.

The contrast between Maeterlinck's Anthony and Flaubert's Antony is great; Flaubert's long play, filled with rational and material temptations, requires Antony to fight to exhaustion against aerial demons, while Maeterlinck's play leaves the saint in tacit acceptance of his rejection by the contemporary family. A comparison reveals that active fighting against worldly temptations purifies Flaubert's Antony, while peacefully accepting the rejection and abuse of Hortense's family signifies the moral purity of Maeterlinck's. While the effort of Flaubert's character ends in a definitive victory in spent success, Maeterlinck's play leaves the audience feeling indignation towards the

family and humiliation over their own association with a society that hypocritically rejects sacrifice in favor of immediate monetary reward.

Flaubert focuses on the saint and his temptations while Maeterlinck focuses on society, and on the audience. Therein lies the main distinction between saints' plays of the pre- and postwar periods. The saints' plays produced after WWI present heroes whose stories of alienation shift focus from themselves to the society in which they are persecuted—a society, like that of the Classical chorus, representing the audience themselves. These plays deploy religious figures, rejected by religious and political institutions, as weapons against current religious and national politics, working on the consciousness of their audiences to reflect on their own participation in suppressing personal faith.

Universal Saintliness

William James's understanding of universal saintliness purports to generalize components of saintliness through all religions and cultures: "The saintly character is the character for which spiritual emotions are the habitual centre of the personal energy; and there is a certain composite photograph of universal saintliness, the same in all religions, of which the features can easily be traced" (James 271). This concept of saintliness widens the criteria of the Catholic Church. A vestige of universal saintliness manifests in modern saints' plays, as their authors focus on qualities of the saints rather than the dogmas to which they adhere. Shaw goes so far as to assert the illusory nature of Joan's visions. He claims in the preface to *Saint Joan* that rather than being actual missives from Saints Michael, Catherine, and Margaret, "the voices and visions were illusory, and their wisdom all Joan's own," as confirmed "by the occasions on which they failed her,

notably during her trial, when they assured her that she would be rescued" (Shaw, *Saint Joan*, "Failures of the Voices"). Thus it was the saintly quality of following her convictions to their rational end, withstanding the "ultimate human test of suicide" (Shaw, *Saint Joan*, "Failures of the Voices"), that made her a saint, not the miracle of the voices that sent her in men's clothing against England.

James also contends that saintliness should conform to "common sense" in a manner of confirmation.

> What I then propose to do is, briefly stated, to test saintliness by common-sense, to use human standards to help us decide how far the religious life commends itself as an ideal kind of human activity. If it commends itself, then any theological beliefs that may inspire it, in so far forth will stand accredited. (James 331)

In the context of saints and saints' plays, James's concept of "testing" saintliness errs in that it makes humans the judges of saintliness rather than God. What Shaw's, Eliot's, and Stein's plays all make clear is that the saint possesses a special vision of God's will—a kind of sight that goes beyond common sense, whether it is of human or divine origin. For Shaw, the vision belongs to a superwoman who persists in breaking contemporary convention; for Eliot the saint's knowledge of God's will surpasses that of the townsfolk of the Chorus or the Priests who attempt to save him; for Stein, the special sight is given to artists, especially cubists, who see and portray the world as it really is, unblemished by the conventional depictions of academic artists. Stein presents Spanish saints of the Counter Reformation as they exist currently—in a tapestry of biographical references, metaphorical descriptions, and allusions to statuary and artwork.

The composition of these three modern saints' plays included a method of uncovering and revealing the truth of the saints portrayed. Shaw and Eliot both sought eyewitness accounts and medieval records in order to present the saints accurately. Stein

relied on the artistic technique of cubism to illustrate accurately her experience of saints in Avila before the war. Each play acknowledges in its own way the mysterious cloaking achieved by centuries of legend and seeks to reveal the most essential aspects of its saint.

Antinationalist Saints

In the wake of Ibsen, Chekov, and Strindberg, modern theater became increasingly international as dramatists from Belgium, Germany, Italy, France, England, Ireland, Spain, and the US opened plays in the theaters of Paris, London, Berlin, and New York. Plays written and banned in London opened in Berlin and Paris before crossing seas to Broadway. This nationless world of theatrical art created for itself a virtual space whose continuity resided in the modern criticism of oppressive institutions. One of the most cosmopolitan art forms in the early years of the twentieth century was the modern saint's play, championing the individual in conflict with religious, economic, and political institutions. Only a priority on the individual soul's disposition outside political affiliations could account for the popularity of a Joan of Arc or a Catholic St. Thomas in the protestant monarchy of England. The structure and ideology of several movements coalesced after WWI affecting these new saints' plays. The existentialism of Kierkegaard and the naturalism of Strindberg, which grew into expressionism and surrealism, united in the cosmopolitan modern theater of European saints' plays written for stage, radio, and opera.

Modern saints' plays became an international showplace for social commentary critical of established institutions while also lauding culturally popular saints. Wilde, Shaw, Maeterlinck, Brecht, Eliot, and Stein surprisingly craft religious plays that confirm the strength of popular saints while also criticizing the international society that might

venerate them. Maeterlinck's satire relentlessly exposes the hypocrisy of a society that would pray to saints as a matter of cosmetic correctness. Several modern authors of saints' plays are difficult to categorize nationally, yet all of them are associated with first-world nations of Empire. None of them were enmeshed in the calcifying of a national identity to oppose imperial domination like artists from India, Africa, the Caribbean, or those focused on Irish nationalism. They do not exert their efforts to empower or even define a specific people, but rather to undermine such borders. Their portrayals of nationally significant saints like Joan of Arc and Thomas Becket are not nationalistic, but rather claim saintliness as a heroic, human quality that sets the saint apart from ordinary people.

Christianity manifested itself in increasingly individual terms after the Reformation and emerging critical studies of the Bible in the nineteenth century. A new focus on the unique relationship between Christ, as personal savior, and the individual Christian grew out of an emerging Evangelical movement. At the same time, "Catholic Modernism" movement within Catholicism attempted to reinterpret traditional doctrine in light of cultural development. These modernists were expelled or forced to take an oath against a modernism. The alienation of religious modernists from the Catholic Church bore a small resemblance to the days of the inquisition and its expulsion of heretics. But those heretics hardly experienced the popular acceptance received by authors of modern saints' plays whose work was often banned in one country only to open in another, eventually making its way back home in later years.[3]

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[3] One example of this is Wilde's *Salome*, which was banned in London as a result of the Lord Chamberlain's censoring of the name of Christ being spoken onstage. The play was banned from public performance in London in 1894 and not performed there publicly

Despite their alienation from political institutions, Christian saints such as St. Paul, Catherine of Alexandria, and Thomas Becket evolved as heroic characters in medieval drama. The fervor of their cults established legends of the saints, some of whose miracles continued long after their deaths as they appeared posthumously among the faithful. Though often lauded as local and even national heroes, the individual struggles of these saints made perfect fodder for a modern theater critical of both religious and political institutions. Morally compelled to maintain individual integrity in support of their own personal, religious revelations, and moral stances, the saints depicted in modern saints' plays support arguments against tyranny, often inconsistent with audience expectations of "saints," honed by centuries of tradition. Although Joan of Arc was not canonized a saint until 1920, myriad images, books, plays, and movies made about her even before that date assume her spiritual superiority, making Shaw's interpretation of her as a true heretic all the more surprising.

Untethered from a traditional representation intended for religious instruction and celebration, modern dramatists focused on a critique of the church that canonized the saints they portray. By championing the saint against an antagonistic church or state, these plays challenge audiences to examine their own loyalties—to themselves as autonomous entities and to institutions that would suppress the individual in order to thrive. This focus on the individual echoes the Existentialism of Søren Kierkegaard developed decades earlier, which emphasized the spiritual necessity of individuals to choose faith in God as a way of being responsible for determining meaning in their lives (Watts 4-6). Besides Shaw's Joan of Arc, Eliot's Thomas Becket stands out as a prime

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until 1931 when the popularity of films from the US and pressure to produce other plays in London that included references to Christ eventually phased the ban out.

example of this individuality. Urged by Tempters, Knights, Priests, and Chorus to comply with Henry's demands or hide from the Knights, Thomas is faithful to his conviction that opposing the Knights is God's will.

The devastating effects of WWI effected deep changes in theater, including a re-characterization of heroism sobered by the sacrifices of war. While Symbolism, Surrealism, and German Expressionism developed in the years preceding WWI, the convergence of these dramas with the medievalism of the saint's play flourished in the decades of the Lost Generation between the World Wars. Legend-based medieval saints' plays depicted the valiant and God-centered heroic virtue of saints like St. Paul in instructive dramas intended to depict the Christ-like nature of saints. They faced adversity with confidence in the victory of Christ. Post WWI theater inspired saints' plays affected by the "emancipation" of religious modernism and the sober knowledge that victory comes at an appalling price to individual soldiers and their families. Seemingly inspired more by the agonized Christ of Gethsemane than the triumphant Christ of the resurrection, modern saints' plays explore the abandonment of saints, estranged from their countries and/or church, before their stories were used as beacons of perfection to enhance vassalage to the church. Forward looking playwrights such as Maeterlinck, Brecht, Shaw, Eliot, and Stein produce saints who find themselves experiencing the alienating effect of freedom, untethered from the protective canopy of social, religious, and political institutions. This concept, honed in modern saints' plays of the period between the World Wars, would be developed and refined later in the century in the work of Sartre, Beckett, and Camus.

The medievalism of these modern saints' plays is exhibited in both their content and structure: they concern the lives and miracles of saints, and, rather than the three acts of Aristotelian tragedy or the five acts of Latin drama, they employ a series of scenes similar to the Catholic stations of the cross (Shaw and Stein) or the Catholic mass (Eliot). Half a century after the medievalism of Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites celebrated the natural aesthetic and communal labor of medieval art and architecture, the international nature of the medieval church provides an arena in which the politics of the church breach national borders. The powerful church that spanned the known world reached into every country of Europe, presenting both challenge and support to local governments. This international institution posed a kind of foil to the compartmentalized secular nations of the Western world after WWI, which allowed dramatists to focus on the individuals rather than their nationalism.

Shaw develops a concept of Protestantism in the preface to *Saint Joan* that celebrates the ability of individuals to determine God's will based on their own experiences rather than adhere to the authority of the traditional church. Employing "protestant" saints as figures of resistance to tyranny over the individual, Modern dramatists like Shaw, Brecht, and Eliot deployed medievalism in an antinationalist strain, at odds with contemporary national theaters. Rather than essentializing medieval qualities in a nationalistic effort against Empire, these authors deploy medieval forms not only against nationalism, but against the very church that established them, championing the local, individual voice in its fight for the right to live as it would.

Modern Saints' Plays

Chapter II tracks the history of saints' plays as they disappeared from English stages in the Renaissance. It considers the Reformation and secularization of theater as reasons for the disappearance. In the 1840s, the Oxford Movement's interest in Catholicism as well as Pre-Raphaelite preference for the simpler, medieval style of painting again made early Christianity a popular subject for representation. The later nineteenth-century focus on decadence and aestheticism continued the interest in Catholic subjects as Flaubert published *The Temptation of St. Antony* and Wilde composed *Salome*. These Victorian dramas privileged a vision of saints as suffering in a separate space, removed from the complexities of modern life. The end of Chapter II considers a shift in the depiction of saints after the First World War. No longer focusing on suffering, twentieth-century saints' plays bring heroes of the past into a modern sensibility, forging the way for Protestantism and individualism.

The next chapters each present an analysis of a modern saint's play. Chapter III discusses the religious and literary history of Joan of Arc as she has been represented in the five centuries between her death in 1431 and canonization in 1920. George Bernard Shaw's 1923 *Saint Joan* forms the focus of the chapter, initiating social progressivism as a topic of saints' plays, with its Protestant superwoman. Shaw depicts the girl's departure from home and through the three years that culminate in her death. He responds to popular medievalism by uncovering his own interpretation of Joan as a rejected visionary whose voices lead her away from the intercession of the Church and its clergy. The legacy of Joan of Arc as an icon for women's suffrage and silent film tracks the arc of her modern use first as liberator of women during WWI and later as the punished upstart that

would lead women out of the home. Shaw's radical impression of Joan sets the stage for modern saints as heroes whose unique visions lead them to reject societal conventions.

Chapter IV considers T.S. Eliot's 1935 *Murder in the Cathedral*, featuring the martyrdom of Thomas Becket. Employing vestiges of classical and medieval drama, Eliot draws a complicated picture of Thomas's final days, beset by doubts about his own motivations. Through the verse drama, the audience is led to consider every human's choice of following God's will or taking an easier path. Reflecting his research of eyewitness accounts of the murder, Eliot builds tension through the first part of the play and the interlude, which mimic the Liturgy of the Word and sermon of a typical Mass. The sacrifice of Thomas is thus compared to the sacrifice of Christ, whose body is transubstantiated in the Liturgy of the Eucharist as Thomas is transformed into a saint near the play's end. The Knights who kill Thomas present their defenses, listing the secular motivations for their act, and providing a sham defense for the material motivations that corrupt each member of the play's audience in their own turn from performing God's will. Eliot uses the play not only to reveal the human weakness of St. Thomas, but also to pose an example of living one's faith against all odds.

Gertrude Stein's libretto *Four Saints in Three Acts* is discussed in Chapter V. Stein's distinctive use of form and repetition in this saint's play-cum-opera provides audiences with a unique impression of saints. Examining the libretto exclusive of the staging and choreography reveals a play whose form echoes that of most of Stein's other plays with shocking metaphor and a seemingly erratic use of scene and act numbers. The humorous attention to form leaves the audience with a sense of the artistic construction of saints in legends and statues, stained glass, and painting. With some biographical

allusion, Stein's play depicts some specific saints, yet treats them similarly to the myriad unelaborated and fictitious saints of the cast, suggesting that our impression of saints in art is as real as anything else about them. She confirms the saint-like work of artists, who reveal the world through their own special vision in cubist works.

These three visions of saintliness as the Protestant, the flawed martyr, and the artist comprise three reactions to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century idealization of saints as icons of innocent sincerity. The plays each reflect their audience in a socially critical theater that would correct popular understanding both of themselves and the saints through the special vision of the artists who, like the saints they depict, strive to reveal truth. The Epilogue examines the progression of saints' plays in film and on stage through the present day. It assesses the proliferation of canonized saints and changes in the canonization process under Pope John Paul II. In a final consideration of saintliness, the Epilogue reflects on Islamic fundamentalist suicide bombers and their effect on the evolving concept of saintliness in the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER II

MEDIEVAL TO MODERN: SAINTS AND SAINTS' PLAYS FROM THE REFORMATION TO WWI

During the English Reformation, saints' plays disappeared from the English stage, not to reappear for nearly three centuries. They re-emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century, inspired by a fascination with medievalism and a reinvigorated modern theater. Closet dramas such as Byron's 1817 *Manfred* and Shelley's 1820 *Prometheus Unbound,* with their lengthy philosophical speeches, were too abstract to be produced on the stage,[4] but they offered readers an alternative to the predictable simplicity of popular British drama early in the century. The closet drama changed the theater permanently by the end of the century (Puchner 13-18), as audiences read plays and began to think of them in terms of "literariness" and "writerliness" (Puchner 18), lending itself to complex metaphysical deliberations. Gustave Flaubert spent a quarter of the century writing his *Temptations of Saint Antony*, which he completed in 1849 and then spent years revising until its publications in 1856 and 1872. Flaubert's play presents the religious arguments of demons and heretics, come to tempt St. Antony and torment him with luxuries and heresies. The mixture of abstract heresies and physical temptations

[4] "Closet drama seems to depend on the whims of theater managers and on the hurt pride of dramatists, from Seneca through Milton to Byron, who 'officially' refused to write for the stage as soon as they felt rejected by it" (Puchner 13-14).

that played on his asceticism, such as women and food, constitute a barrage of unstageable, hallucinatory scenes.

The emergence of theatrical realism and decadence later in the century inspired dramatists like Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw to write innovative, socially critical drama, depicting the hypocrisy, pettiness, and inadequacies of bourgeois life. Following the Oxford Movement that reintroduced traditional Catholicism to the Anglican Church, a vigorous interest in medieval sincerity and its contrast to the moral complexities of modern life inspired a vast number of works depicting Catholic Saints. Several versions of the life of twelfth-century ascetic St. Francis of Assisi were published, along with a number of medieval-style, gospel-inspired paintings by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Childhood of Mary, Virgin and Mary Magdalene at the Home of Simon the Pharisee. Beginning with this new primitivism in painting, the way for modern saints' plays was paved by an interest in the intersection of past and present, much like the original cult of the saints believed in the invigoration of power when the passion of a saint was read at his or her gravesite. However, rather than affirming faith and bringing the presence of the early martyr into the present, nineteenth-century saints' plays exposed the distance between the saints' perfect sincerity and the inevitable corruption of modernity.

The End of Medieval Saints' Plays

In the Middle Ages, the church that had banned theatrical performances for nearly a millennium became their most important sponsor. By the time plays had moved outside church walls, guilds and other community groups also sponsored dramatic productions, usually in conjunction with a pageant, feast day, or other church celebration, such as the

feast of Corpus Christi.[5] Even if the plays were not fully financed by the church, the productions were religious in nature, mainly focusing on Biblical interpretations and the miracles of various saints. They were performed in conjunction with Church festivals and, together with morality plays, were a significant influence on the religious intellect of the time.

The significance of their influence grew in England as the relationship between Rome and the English Crown became increasingly strained. Controversies over investiture, land ownership, taxes, and the rights of clergy plagued the Church in England, and especially at Canterbury, where three different Archbishops quarreled famously with the monarch.[6] During the English Reformation, plays depicting the relationship between Rome and England became a venue for Protestant propaganda by Henry VIII and his supporters (Sahiner 219). The need to control or diminish this influential medium led Henry VIII and his successors to ban religious material and Biblical interpretations from the stage. The reign of Edward VI saw the continuation of bans on mystery cycles, though they made a brief come back under Mary I. The

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[5] Pope Urban IV instituted the feast of Corpus Christi globally in 1264, to celebrate the Holy Presence of Christ's body in the Eucharist. The feast falls on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, which is the first Sunday after Pentecost. Since Pentecost is measured by the date of Easter, which falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Vernal Equinox, the calendar date changes each year depending on the moon cycle at the time of the Vernal Equinox.

[6] Saint Anselm of Canterbury (Archbishop from 1093 to 1109) was exiled first due to the investiture controversy by William II and later by Henry I due to his refusal to pay homage to the King (this was later compromised with approval by Rome). Saint Thomas á Becket (Archbishop from 1162-1170) was murdered as a result of his resistance to Henry II in matters of the rights of the See of Canterbury to crown the monarch of England, taxes due to the crown, rights of the clergy to ecclesiastic courts, and excommunication of bishops loyal to the king. Later, Cranmer was appointed Archbishop by Henry VIII in 1532 and served until Mary I had him executed in 1556 for his heresy in supporting Henry's Reformation.

proclamations issued during her reign "tended to ban performances unless they had the Crown's 'special licence in writynge'" (Sahiner 223). After a brief revival of anti-papist drama when Elizabeth I took the throne, the controversy surrounding theater led to the Proclamation of 1559, which decreed that no public play could be produced without a license obtained through a government-commissioned agent. One function of these agents became censoring material deemed by the crown and her supporters as unfit for public consumption, especially due to political and religious material including Biblical interpretation by those unqualified in "aucthoritie, learning and wisedome" (Sahiner 224). Moreover, between the start of the English Reformation and the reign of James I, use and control of the theater passed from religious and community groups to commercial enterprises. "From being an occasional national pastime organized as a component part of all festive celebrations, towards the end of the Tudor period, the theatre became a commercial metropolitan organization designed for leisure and recreation for those who supported it" (Sahiner 228). Thus, the desire of the government to harness the power of the theater to influence public opinion during a time of great unrest between English Catholics and Protestants was responsible for drama's ultimate divorce from the church and move to the secular marketplace.

Though a few manuscripts of Corpus Christi cycles and two saints' plays remain, bans, persecutions, damage, and disuse destroyed the texts of nearly all medieval English saints' plays. Because the cult of the saints was so strongly associated with the Church in Rome, the veneration of its saints proved antithetical to the progressive austerity of Protestantism. Plays including any kind of religious material diminished throughout the Renaissance, a symptom of what Julia Lupton describes as the transformation of

medieval hagiography into a complex typology that was manifested in secular works of that time. She demonstrates how the structure of saints' legends, based on Jacob de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* (or *Lives of the Saints*), appears in prominent works of the Renaissance, including selections from Bocaccio's *Decameron,* Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, and Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and *A Winter's Tale*. This secularization of religious concepts into nonreligious works of painting, poetry, and government-censored drama illustrates the continuing significance of religious concepts such as triumph over evil, perfect suffering, and resurrection. While these concepts never disappeared from literature, the overt naming of specific saints whose lives served as the antecedents of typologies disappeared for over two centuries in English drama, between the reigns of Elizabeth I and Victoria I. The intervening ages of Enlightenment and Romanticism contributed interpretive concepts that reshaped the saints' plays that would re-emerge in mid-nineteenth-century England. Original motivations for celebrating the lives of saints in worship and ceremony never returned to England; however, aspects of a rising aestheticism and decadence paralleling the Oxford Movement and Catholic Revival shaped a multitude of hagiographical work in the nineteenth century, beginning with painting, then moving into poetry, lives/biographies, and plays. These hagiographical works emerged due to the popular social and artistic perception of the purity of saints and the early church as distant and exotic in their simplicity. Conversely, after the turn of the century and especially after WWI, the perceived congruity between saints and modern heroes made them useful instruments of social criticism.

A New Medievalism

After the violent years of the Reformation, struggle between church and government bodies for control of the theater in England was eased under the rule of James I as he took personal control of all the theaters, plays, and actors. He made the Lord Chamberlain's Men members of his royal household, renaming them the King's Men, and allowing them to perform without need of licenses (Sahiner 227). Thus, theater fell under the protection of the monarch, and in the interregnum, during which Lord Protectorate Oliver Cromwell ruled, theater was outlawed as an immoral remnant of monarchy and non-Puritan values. The restoration brought with it a return to theater's popularity, but not with a veneration of the saints. The Church cycles had been lost or banned and public favor turned to bawdy restoration comedy and a reactive, sanctioning satirization of the aristocracy. A dark age for saints' plays began during the Reformation, darkened during the interregnum, and they failed to reappear until new interest in Catholicism and the early martyrs dawned in nineteenth-century England.

One dramatic form that persevered through the restoration and into the nineteenth century is mumming, or mummers' plays. These plays were rarely scripted and proceeded from a different religious history than did the miracle and mystery plays of the Corpus Christi cycles. With their origins in pagan ritual commemorating the death of the old year and celebrating the beginning of the new year, mummers' plays evolved in an amalgam of religious and dramatic forms, as well as carnival customs. Including an element of Commedia dell'arte, masked types rather than a scripted cast act out a farcical performance in which a main character, most often Saint George, fights a villain, often a Saracen. One of the combatants dies and in the end, a quack doctor sweeps in and cures

all, bringing the deceased back to life. The plays are usually performed door-to-door, in public houses, or in the streets for money. This form of mumming in England and America date to the late eighteenth century and continue to the present day, with groups performing throughout England and the American Northeast.[7] Despite the fact that they often featured St. George, the mummers' plays genre is clearly distinct from saints' plays because of their improvisational nature as well as their focus on regeneration rather than the holiness of the saint.

While pagan origins of the death and rebirth aspect of mummers' plays were not known in Victorian times, James Frazer connects the dying and rising of the year with mummers' plays in *The Golden Bough*, published in 1890 (Frazer 174). Frazer's book, together with Freud's theories of psychoanalysis (1890s), and William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), contributed to a new conception of connectedness among disparate human existences at the turn of the century that Victorian times lacked (Squillace 172). Before the new century, popular understanding held persons of previous time periods, including saints, as distant and inaccessible, quite distinct from modern man, subject to the altered situation and psychology of modern society (Lears 142). These sentiments were facilitated by Hegelian and Darwinian concepts of progressive evolution that theorized fundamental moral and physical change over time (Squillace 187-8). Distant and idealized, the saints came to represent monuments of purity and innocence in the new dawn of hagiography inspired by the revival of interest in

[7] The text of the scripted early nineteenth-century "Oxfordshire Saint George Play" can be found at http://www.elfinspell.com/StGeorgeStyle.html. Information on the Philadelphia Mummers' Museum and their annual New Year's Day performances can be found at http://www.philaplace.org/story/177/.

Catholicism and the early martyrs, including art, poetry, lives, and some saints' plays (Lears 142, 151).

Though overtly religious images in art had never completely disappeared in England, during the Enlightenment, rococo images of luxury and portraiture as well as neoclassical pagan images and architecture predominated. The Romantic period saw a proliferation of neoclassicism and sublime images of nature that seemed to take the former place of Catholic religious art. One group who played a significant role in the return of Biblical and saintly images to art and poetry in England in the mid-nineteenth century was the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. They began as a brotherhood of artists (the PRB) in 1848, including William Holden Hunt, John Everett Millais, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Prince Albert, a cofounder of the Arundel Society in 1848, sought "to make better known and to produce 'the severer and purer styles of earlier Art…and elevate the tone of our national school of painting and sculpture'" (des Cars 19). This "earlier art" refers to medieval art that predates the Renaissance and Enlightenment painting typified by Michelangelo and Rubens, which employ the single-point perspective made famous by Raphael. Painting before Raphael tended toward symbolism rather than realism, with spatial arrangements composed for emphasis and allegory. Like John Ruskin, the PRB admired a medieval aesthetic that blended natural and human elements with symbols that give the simpler images a depth of significance. In this way, the PRB's "search for the direct and sincere representation of nature as the sole foundation of any creative process once again harkened back to the 'primitive' or early Christian painters" (des Cars 21),

also called Nazarene[8] (Péteri 20). Multiple aspects of Pre-Raphaelite paintings characterize the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century conception of saints found in modern saints plays, including the depiction of human frailty and a connection to the supernatural in a space separated from urban life.

D.G. Rossetti's *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848/49) was the first of the Pre-Raphaelite paintings to capture the simpler and symbolic Nazarene aesthetic while also incorporating the PRB's unique principle of portraying a scene as it might actually have happened (Péteri 21). They found the "idealized grace and sweetness" (des Cars 21) of early-nineteenth-century painting, such as Charles Eastlake's *Christ Blessing Little Children* (1839), to be too institutional. This painting depicts a perfect single-point perspective of a haloed, patient Christ surrounded by beautiful, cherub-like children and their parents in a tiled hall. In contrast, they brought medieval painting techniques, which concentrated more on symbolic representations of people and space on the canvas as well as a connection between humanity and the generative cycles of nature. Vines, gardens, and flowers play a significant role in many Pre-Raphaelite works, such as images of *The Annunciation* by Arthur Hughes in 1858 and D.G. Rossetti in 1861. Depicting the event in a garden rather than inside a house, these works connect Mary with nature, representing her purity with living lily plants and vines suggesting the Christian faith. In both paintings, Mary is separated from Gabriel by a fence or archway, indicating the

[8] The Nazarene artists were a group of German painters who formed an association in 1809 and were committed to restoring a sense of the medieval spirit to art. They were an anti-academic group reacting to eighteenth-century Neoclassicism, believing that art should serve a moral rather than a merely aesthetic purpose. They employed techniques of medieval and early Renaissance painters and rejected modern composition established in the later Renaissance.

separation of the human saint from the Archangel who occupies the natural space behind. The Enlightenment and Romantic periods, like the Renaissance before them, had seen a translation of religious images and texts into secular depictions. A "natural supernaturalism," as described by Thomas Carlyle and M.H. Abrams, permeated English arts in the early nineteenth century, expressing divine power and beauty in nature. The PRB maintained this image of nature as supernatural and the saints' connection to it in their illustrations of religious figures such as the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, St. Catherine, Saint Sebastian, and many figures from the Bible. The separate space of saints becomes a significant symbolic aspect of the depiction of saints in both painting and in the drama that would emerge later in the century.

The connection of saints' to nature was prevalent in the work of the PRB; even more so was the meeting of religion and Romanticism in their work. The dead female, either killed in her innocence or punished for her inability to refrain from sin, played prominently in the paintings of Rossetti, Hunt, and Millais. A comparison of Romanticism and Catholicism is implicit in some of these works depicting women. In Hunt's original drawing of *The Lady of Shalott* (for *Poems* by Alfred Lord Tennyson, London: E. Moxom, 1857), "the mirror is flanked by a large picture of the Crucifixion, the archetype of agonized self-sacrifice, the ideal which the Lady of Shalott has failed to emulate"[9] (Poulson 177). The perfect sacrifice of Christ emphasizes the Lady of Shalott's failure to remain faithfully at her loom, which sets in motion her eventual death. Rather than juxtapose the images though, Hunt produced a parallel image of Eve

[9] She fails to heed the "curse": "A curse be on her if she stay to look down to Camelot." Instead she goes to the window to look on Lancelot when she sees him in the mirror. This transgression sets in motion her death on the river.

committing the original sin behind the Lady of Shalott who becomes tangled in the web she leaves in her transgression. In the end, the Lady of Shalott will die and be given up to the river, like Millais's "Ophelia." The Lady of Shalott's popularity proliferated from until the First World War as she became an example of the secluded artist, "who is so dedicated to art and so isolated from the outside world that its eventual impact brings total destruction" (Poulson 179). This nascent concept of the artist singled out, with a special vision of society, would become a main theme in the modernism of the early twentieth century, playing a major role in modern saints' plays by George Bernard Shaw, T.S. Eliot, and Gertrude Stein.

The symbolic style whose roots predated the ordered, single-point perspective that had become standard in the academy characterized Pre-Raphaelite religious painting. Rather than produce realistic "perspectivist rationality," paintings of the PRB embraced a "primitive" technique that made alternative use of space, focusing on symbolism instead of the standard spatial illusion of the academy (McGann para. 4). Illustrated adroitly in D. G. Rossetti's drawing *Mary Magdalene at the House of Simon the Pharisee*, PRB philosophy offered primitive use of spatial arrangement as a spiritual alternative to the rational or worldly arrangement of academic art. In the painting, Simon's home forms a separate, spiritual space on the right side of the canvas, while a crowded alleyway representing worldly space on the left side of the canvas conforms to standard single point perspective. Mary Magdalene is impeded on her way by the crowded bodies of the outside world as she looks toward Simon's house, where she will wash Jesus's feet in her tears and receive great forgiveness for her sins, as told in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 7. The icon of Christ seems to float on the right side of the drawing, either as an image on

the exterior wall of the house or as Christ inside a window. The flatness of the icon marks his spiritual difference from the other subjects in the painting (McGann para. 3). Vines and lilies grow on the house, marking its purity and connection to nature, and Mary holds in her arms a wild bunch of lilies and greens. These flowers are piled in her arms in juxtaposition with the neatly woven crowns of flowers worn by the people in the worldly crowd. Besides contrasting the different techniques, Rossetti sets up a rivalry between rational and spiritual concerns in the picture, emphasizing the antirational teachings of Christ with the flat icon and the often antirational faith of the saint indicated by the wild vines and flowers Mary holds. The difference depicted here between the common people and the saint as well as the separateness of spiritual space from the busy community characterizes the separation and difference of medieval saints from the complexities of modernity.

All three original members of the PRB, Hunt, Millais, and Rossetti, produced paintings depicting Biblical scenes and images of saints. Millais's body of work contains a group of paintings that might have made up a medieval play cycle, with images of "The Return of the Dove to the Arc," "Esther," and various other Old and New Testament narratives. Millais's "Christ in the Home of his Parents" (1849/50), Rossetti's "Ecce Ancilla Domini" (1850), and Hunt's "Finding of the Saviour at the Temple" (1860) all present realistically styled images of the Holy Family in human rather than glorified or theatrical terms. The girlish fear of a young Mary confronted by Gabriel, an injured child Jesus helping in his father's workshop, and the relief of a mother finding her lost son all painted with a symbolic and alternative use of space point to the duality of the Holy Family's natural humanity and spirituality. The sense of realism in these Pre-Raphaelite

paintings parallels the increasing realism of nineteenth- and twentieth-century theater, which would emphasize the human qualities of saints like Antony the Great, Joan of Arc, and Thomas Becket.

Catholicism and The Oxford Movement

The Oxford movement led by John Keeble, John Henry Newman, Hurrel Froude, and William Palmer contributed to the renewed popularity of medieval religious milieu in England in the mid-nineteenth century and inspired members of the PRB. As the investiture controversy plagued the medieval church, a controversy about whether or not secular political bodies have the right to abolish bishoprics arose in 1833 as the British Parliament prepared to abolish two archbishoprics and eight bishoprics in Ireland (Phillips 1). Resisting this interference of government in religious concerns, the "tracts" put forth by the men of the Oxford movement between 1833 and 1841 defended "the dignity of the church" and sought to promote "personal holiness" through traditional Catholic components of the Church of England. John Henry Newman's final conclusion that apostolic succession located the seat of the English church in Rome eventually led him and hundreds of others to convert to Roman Catholicism, while the other members of the movement effected a strong trend in High Church Anglicanism. Anglo-Catholicism[10] was the "heir to the Oxford Movement" and "came to encapsulate many of the ideas and practices advocated by the Tractarians: reverence for the early church, clerical vestments, high altars, solemn masses, and religious statuary" (Faught 27). These concerns affected

[10] Anglo-Catholicism should be understood as a reverence for the high-Church traditions of the Church of England, inherited from its origin in the Roman Church, but distinguished from Roman Catholicism practiced in England and puritan, low-Church Protestantism.

the aesthetic of the Pre-Raphaelites, especially Christina Rossetti (D'Amico and Kent 93).

In Christina Rossetti's 1959 poem, "The Goblin Market," one sister, Lizzie, suffers the efforts of goblins to feed her fruits that have severely damaged the health of her sister, Laura. The juice of the fruits, which Laura sucks from Lizzie's body, become Laura's salvation. While there are a multitude of meaningful analyses of this story, the most basic shows that the faithful suffering of an innocent restores health and life that was threatened by a corrupting evil. The ecstasy aroused by Lizzie's ability to withstand the goblins' evil is regenerative and reminiscent of Christ's sacrifice of the blood that would be drunk for centuries by faithful Catholics. Lingering in the text is Laura's redemption from the original sin of eating the goblins' fruit through the sacrifice of the saintly Lizzie. The poem reinforces the Anglo-Catholic emphasis on the importance of the Eucharist and solemnity of the Mass, both of which play a significant role in Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*.

While the Christ analogy in "Goblin Market" is profound, the story does not directly parallel the gospel story: Lizzie does not die, and it is not her body that is resurrected, but Laura's. Rather, she fights evil beings in a sacrificial and victorious suffering. This pattern parallels that of a desert saint, such as Saint Antony the Great or Saint Francis of Assisi. These saints would dominate literary decadence in the late nineteenth century, combining the concept of suffering in a space apart from the ordinary world with that of the gothic, decorative aesthetic of the Catholic Church. In the work of the Pre-Raphaelites, the reunion of religious concepts and meditations on righteous suffering so long associated with the pining of lovers, together with a graphic, separate

spiritual space, provided an opportunity for the re-emergence of named saints as artistic subjects in the mid-nineteenth century. Their concentration on aesthetics eventually provided some overlap with another aesthetic movement, also with connections to Catholicism.

Decadence and the Fin de Siécle

In 1857, Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* unveiled an honest and complex image of human motivation that transgressed the moral standards of the French literary tradition. While Flaubert's novel revealed the dissatisfaction and sexual indiscretion resulting from stifling social expectations of domesticity, Baudelaire's collection pushed the limits of printability, exposing the extents of depraved worship and immorality to which the human soul might wander in search of satisfaction in a secular, fallen, and imperfect world. The ecstatic pleasure and suffering in these extremes, together with a complex spirituality in which the human soul exists eternally, epitomize the art, poetry, and drama in France and England that would become the Decadent movement. Adding an erotic element to the suffering of both Christ and early saints, the imagery of the Decadent movement became closely associated with Catholicism. Its fascination with the suffering and decay of the organic body in opposition to unblemished artifice led to a fascination with the body of Christ in the Eucharist. Decadence in England aggressively straddled the extremes of Roman Catholicism, at once glorious in its statuary, vestments, incense, and ritual, as well as its connection with the lowest rung of society. "Catholicism was to quite an extent a religion of the slums, because the Irish were heavily over-represented in the poorest sections of the English working class" (McLeod 40). Often pointing to the divine in images of decay

and filth, the contrary symbolism of decadence fit the conflation of human and divine attributes of saints, while simultaneously enhancing the logic of representing saints in a space separate from modern society. Works of decadence both revile the decay of nature's organic bodies as well as rejoice in artificial works in their image. "Decadent thinkers accepted Rousseau's idea that nature is good and civilization bad, yet they enthusiastically preferred the artificial: such perverse enjoyment of what is thought to be evil characterizes decadence" (Weir 4).

In the later half of the nineteenth century, several prominent authors would become nearly obsessed with a specific saint, spending an inordinate number of years working on pieces that concerned them. Mark Twain became infatuated with Joan of Arc, and Tennyson with Thomas Becket. The decadent movement with its French roots and Catholic imagery ushered in the first manifestations of modern saints' plays, the earliest of which came from France: Flaubert's *The Temptation of Saint Antony*. Flaubert began this drama in the 1840s, finishing a first version in 1849, then another "shortened and reshaped" version after *Madame Bovary*, parts of which were published in *L'Artist* in 1856-7. Finally, in 1874, he published a more mature, "remoulded," version that he called "l'oeuvre de toute ma vie," the work of his lifetime (Mrovosky in Flaubert 13), having taken a quarter of a century to produce.

The Temptation focuses on the dealings of Saint Antony the Great of Alexandria, who struggles in his home in the desert with demons sent to tempt him into surrendering to the base desires of his corrupt will. One source for the decadent concept of the human will's baseness is found in the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860).

> The keystone of Schopenhauer's thought is the concept of the denial of the will. The individual is not free but is at the mercy of the will, the ultimate primeval

> force underlying all existence. As the individual manifestation of the will exerts itself in the world, it comes into conflict with other individual wills, causing suffering and unhappiness. The only escape from this cruel but necessary state of struggle is the individual's denial of the will in deference to others. One must live the life of an ascetic or saint, denying all personal pleasures and desires, until the release of death, the ultimate renunciation of will and the only true good. (L. Brown, "Wagner" para. 11)

Moving on from the Romantic affirmation of will in works such as Goethe's *Faust*, Wagner's *Siegfried* in the 1852 *Ring Cycle* provides an example of the hero who embraces his will, only to finally reject it after having wallowed in erotic depths. The depraved depths of the human will and desire for release from the continual conflict it ignites appears in Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* and throughout the literature of decadence, including Flaubert, Huysmans, DG and Christina Rossetti, Beardsley, Wilde and Eliot.

Saintliness, not just for the Decadents, but also generally in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came to occupy a space apart from the urban concerns of modern life. A "group of overlapping mentalities" from the "voluminous late-Victorian writings on medieval beliefs and values," including the antimodern visions of Ruskin and Morris (Lears 63), establish the medieval traits "embodied in a variety of dramatis personae": "Pale innocence, fierce conviction, physical and emotional vitality, playfulness and spontaneity, an ability to cultivate fantastic or dreamlike states of awareness, an intense other-worldly asceticism" (Lears 142). In early twentieth-century America, "to feel drawn toward medieval mentalities was to participate in the recovery of primal irrationality, to share in the primitivist impulse of the late nineteenth century" (Lears 142). In a modern, urban atmosphere "permeated by feelings of psychic imprisonment, the exploration of the soul's farthest reaches (typified in the ecstatic life experiences of medieval saints) evoked a new admiration" (Lears 161). The traits of saintliness left as a legacy of decadence included not only a physical departure from the

urban center of life in Alexandria, Jerusalem, Rome, or Assisi, but also a voyage into the spiritual depths of the human soul inaccessible in modern life. The early saints of Decadent saints' plays are victorious in their attempts to deny their corrupt wills while the modern heroes of Decadent novels, mainly Joris-Karl Huysmans's des Esseintes and Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray, ultimately fail in their attempts to deny nature.

Flaubert exemplifies the separate spiritual space of the desert saint partially by limiting the action of the play to Antony's desert temptations. This choice mimics medieval saints' plays about St. Nicholas, which tended to include a single miracle or group of miracles (often posthumous), rather than his biography, which was conveyed in prose work like the *Legenda Aurea*. The desert saint in the nineteenth century suffers and achieves victory in a space removed both from the masses in the cities and from ordinary domestic space in general. The concept of spiritual achievement occurring outside the ordinary sphere appears throughout the Bible and allegorical works: Lizzie suffers the goblins' assault outside her home in Christina Rossetti's poem; both the austerities of St. Francis and the temptations of St. Antony take place outside the urban center; St. Paul experiences conversion on the road to Damascus; Moses encounters the burning bush at Mt. Horeb on the far side of the desert from Midian where he is living; Abraham journeys to Moriah and leaves his servants as he moves into the place of sacrifice alone with Isaac. The separate space associated with spiritual achievement, later codified in the work of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell as the ordeal of the hero's journey, is where he is confronted by his greatest weakness.

Flaubert removes his St. Antony not only from Alexandria but from preceding concepts of theatricality as well. He includes no list of *dramatis personae*. In the text of

the play, stage directions are voluminous and clearly intended to be read, but are impossible to contain in a set. The extensive description reads like paragraphs in a novel:

> The enclosure of rocks cuts off the view to right and left. But out in the desert, as if more and more beaches were unfolding, immense parallel ash-blond undulations stretch on behind each other, gradually rising—while beyond the sands, in the far distance, the wall formed by the Libyan range is the colour of chalk, lightly blurred by a violet haze…(Flaubert 61)

This example comprises the first two sentences of the fourth paragraph of opening stage direction, which is four paragraphs long, each paragraph longer than the last. The metaphorical description of the set "as if more and more beaches were unfolding," implies a level of detail that holds explanatory detail for a director that is best conveyed directly to the audience in words, rather than in the material of the set. As far as stage direction goes, the metaphorical descriptions are impractical, which may be Flaubert's gesture toward defining art, like Walter Pater, as impractical.

In the first act of Flaubert's play, Antony alternately soliloquizes his experiences since leaving his parents' home and complains of his distress and fatigue in the scant comfort his desert home provides. Thoughts of the better amenities of martyrs make him jealous, and demon shadows constantly tease and scare him until he falls, exhausted, to the floor. Flaubert's stage direction informs the reader of further detail that cannot be contained in the action or dialogue of the play:

> Indescribable terror sweeps over him; all he feels is a burning contraction in the pit of the stomach. Despite the uproar in his head, he is aware of a huge silence which cuts him off from the world. He tries to speak: impossible! The overall bond of his being seems to dissolve; and no longer resisting, Antony falls onto the mat. (Flaubert 72)

In order to enhance the terror withstood by the saint, Flaubert characterizes Antony with an undeniably human frailty and irritability. Antony is not the noble St. George bravely slaying the dragon. However, rather than detracting from his achievement in finally

withstanding the temptations, his susceptibility to the most base human cravings and luxuries heighten both the tension of the simple plot and his victory in the end. In reading the play, the audience enjoys both the parade of temptations and the distress they cause the saint in a forum something like the Roman games. By focusing on the weakness of human will while providing 170 pages of temptations, Flaubert counts on the audience to find "perverse enjoyment of what is thought to be evil" (Weir 4). Celebrating the suffering of the saint in his attempts to ward off temptation summarizes the impulse of decadence.

The greatest temptation throughout the play is one exhibited by great religious moguls throughout time: the conviction that one knows the true nature of God. Flaubert dramatically exploits the Christian paradox that to seek God is righteous, but to know Him is blasphemous. Throughout the play, apparitions, heretics, gods, and devils all attempt to convince Antony of a version of the truth of God, whether that be lusty, murderous, or glorious. Antony's true victory does not come in his ultimate desire to know Christ by becoming the creation as the Logos, as "matter itself," but in the stage direction that finishes the play: "Antony makes the sign of the cross and returns to his prayers." In returning to worship, Antony confirms his humility, and his mere humanity. The impact and the irony of the play, and of decadence itself for that matter, is that Christian readers feel guilty about the pleasure they derive from imbibing the blasphemy, which, in turn, separates them from the saint.

Advancing the popularity and significance of decadence to an even greater extent than Baudelaire or Flaubert, Huysmans' 1884 novel *À Rebours*, often translated *Against Nature* or *Against the Grain*, presents a narrative loosely allegorizing two of Flaubert's

works, *The Temptation of St. Antony* and *Bouvard and Pécuchet*. Both works include protagonists who leave the city to inhabit a special space, though the latter concerns perfecting one's knowledge rather than perfecting oneself in worship of God. In *À Rebours*, the protagonist, des Esseintes, leaves his life in Paris to inhabit a country estate where he endeavors to perfect an eternal artifice, but is thwarted in each attempt by the natural decay of organic life, until he is ultimately forced to return to the city. The novel is almost an inversion of Flaubert's closet drama, exposing the distance between the innocence of the desert saints and the hedonism of the modern aesthete.

Also in 1884, Tennyson's epic play *Becket* was published by Macmillan, but it was not staged until 1893 due to its extraordinary length. It is possible that late Victorian interest in saints inspired Tennyson's choice of subject, yet the focus of the play remains irrefutably Romantic. The drama focuses on parallels in the lives of Thomas and Henry II, who both find their lives divided: Henry's between his love for his mistress Fair Rosamund and his duty to his lawful wife Eleanor; Thomas's between his love for his friend Henry and his duty to God and the Church. The addition of the legendary Rosamund narrative diverts attention from the suffering saint, making this play much more akin to Friedrich Schiller's 1801 *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* than Decadent saints' plays of the 1890s. Schiller treats Joan as a romantic hero rather than a saint, but both plays include a love interest that diverts focus from the protagonist's relationship with God. Despite praise of Henry Irving's portrayal of Becket, the play has been all but forgotten; a 1910 short and 1923 silent film of the play were made, but have been lost. The re-establishment of the Canterbury Festival in 1928 re-invigorated interest in narratives about St. Thomas, and Tennyson's play was staged in 1932 and 1933. The

festival commissioned a new play about St. Thomas when Bishop George Bell asked T.S. Eliot to write what would become *Murder in the Cathedral* for the 1935 festival.

As popular as St. Thomas of Canterbury was in England, another subject of religious art and drama proved alluring in France. Many of the most talented French artists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries portrayed Salome as she danced for Herod or received the head of St. John the Baptist, including Flaubert, Mallarmé, Moreau, Levy-Dhurmer, de La Boulaye, Régnault, and Levy-Nancy, just to name a few.[11] The story of the death of John the Baptist in Mark 6 and Matthew 14 tell the story of John's beheading at the request of Herodias' daughter, Salome (though she is not named in any of the Gospels). The story makes clear that Herodias wants John dead because he has spoken against the validity of her own marriage to Herod, in essence calling her a sinful whore. Faithful to her mother, Salome asks for John's head as a prize after she pleases Herod with a sensual dance. Herod grants Salome John's head although he fears John's spiritual power. The lustful and alluring protagonist of the late nineteenth-century version of the story is unique among Biblical narratives—both Salome herself and the legendary kiss she gives St. John's severed head exemplify the perverse components of Decadent literature. Flaubert's meticulous story "Herodias" (1877) and the significant presence of Gustave Moreau's painting of Salome in Huysmans' *À Rebours* (1884) provide ample literary precedent for Oscar Wilde's Decadent play *Salome* in 1893, originally written and published in French. The 1894 English translation, illustrated by another Decadent artist, Aubrey Beardsley, was scheduled for production in London, but

[11] While there are too many examples of paintings of Salome to cite here, the blog site http://art-magique.blogspot.com/2011_04_01_archive.html contains an impressive collection.

was banned "for its violation of the Jacobean proscription against naming Christ onstage" (King 317). Thus, it was produced first in Paris in 1896, and privately in London in 1905 and 1906, while its first public run in England would not come until 1931 when bans on Biblical drama had been overcome by a revival of interest sparked by religious pageants between 1896 and 1902 as well as the American film *From the Manger to the Cross* (1912).

Despite its 1931 English premier date, Wilde's Salome is very much a product of decadence, portraying St. John, called Iokanaan, suffering in a separate physical and spiritual space, eroticized by the perversions of Salome. Although the play's protagonist is Salome, the steadfast character of St. John the Baptist emerges in the modern saints' play, and his martyrdom is central to the plot. Salome's dark desires aim only at the aesthetic sensuality of the saint, while she in turn is seen only in aesthetic and erotic terms by the unsaintly cast. Iokanaan is kept in a well as "The tetrarch has forbidden" anyone to see him. He also comes from a separate space, "From the desert, where he fed on locusts and wild honey" (Wilde 7). Even when he is brought out of the well, his speech is obtuse, never conversing, but only making statements. In the few lines in which he speaks to Salome, he uses the third person, or he makes prophetic demands, such as, "Daughter of Sodom, come not near me! But cover thy face with a veil, and scatter ashes upon thine head, and get thee to the desert and seek out the Son of Man" (Wilde 21). His diction marks a separation between himself and any interlocutor who attempts to speak with him. Associating Iokanaan with the Jewish God and Salome with sensuous (and damned) pagan gods separates the characters as well. The first time Iokanaan is mentioned, the First Soldier explains that "The Jews worship a God you

cannot see" (Wilde 5), and at the end of the page, the Iokanaan's voice is heard but he is not seen. The First Soldier confirms, "A great multitude used to follow him. He even had disciples" (Wilde 7), just like Christ. When the Nubian claims, "The gods of my country are very fond of blood. Twice in the year we sacrifice to them young men and maidens" (Wilde 5), he foreshadows the sacrifice Iokanaan will become to Salome, and the fact that she will "taste" him in her final lines: "Ah ! I have kissed thy mouth, Iokanaan, I have kissed thy mouth. There was a bitter taste on thy lips. Was it the taste of blood?" (Wilde 66). Salome consumes Iokanaan like a communicant at Mass. But this cannibalistic meal is not the body of Christ, only dead flesh. For all of the colors, lights, moons, and beauties the cast sees, none see anything but the organic bodies that act as a cover on the invisible God, and the audience is left to revel in the aesthetics of the play while knowing they take "perverse enjoyment" in what they know "to be evil" (Weir 4).

One of Wilde's aesthetic tricks is writing his play in French, giving it a strange sound because his command of the language is not that of a native speaker. The oddity of phrasing makes the French audience aware of the words, and the translation of French to English provides the same effect in English so effectively that Samuel Becket used the same strategy later in the twentieth century. The syntax of Wilde's play is simple and mimics the symbolist style of Maurice Maeterlinck, a Belgian playwright (Henderson 14) of the same period who also wrote two saints' plays: *A Miracle of Saint Antony* (~1904) and *Mary Magdalene* (1909). *A Miracle of Saint Antony* was performed in Germany "a few years before the war"[12] and in New York by the Washington Square Players in May,

[12] The actual composition date of the play is unknown. In the translator's note to the Dodd, Mead, and Company, Inc. edition of 1918, de Mattos writes, "This play was written some ten or twelve years ago, but has never been published or performed in the

1915, but the first authorized publication of the play came in 1917. *Mary Magdalene*, unlike the medieval English saint's play, dramatizes her life in the weeks leading up to the crucifixion. Maeterlinck exposes the character's love for a Roman military tribune, which is sacrificed when she becomes a disciple of 'the Nazarene'" (Thomas para.1). The play showcases her agony when she is unable to save Jesus from the cross, despite her relationship with the Roman as he demands her body in payment, and she is scorned by Jesus's other followers. This play was banned from the English stage, when it was translated into French in 1910 due to the references to Christ. Though it is considered a minor work, *A Miracle of Saint Antony* marks a profound turn in modern saints' plays from the eroticized agony of Decadent saints' plays to the new social sensibility of modern saints' plays after WWI.

The Modern Theater

Even before the war, playwrights in England, the US, and the continent had begun "to make some comment on genuine human beings, to offer some recognition of the importance of social context—the intellectual drama made flesh, so to speak" (Weales 165). Ushered in by the realism of Ibsen, a growing sense emerged that "theater, once it was freed of the necessity to manufacture vapid entertainment for empty minds, could reclaim the spiritual, the inspirational, the pedagogical function which rightly belonged to an institution which shared common origins with the church" (Weales 164). Several schools of drama made the audience into players themselves, drawn in by the portrayal of

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original. A translation in two acts was printed in Germany a few years before the war; but the present is the only authorized version, in its final, one-act form, that has hitherto appeared in any language." Wikipedia lists a 1904 performance in German, but there is no reference for the claim.

characters and contexts recognizable in their own social settings. German Expressionism, nationalist theaters, the American workers' theater movement (Papa vii-viii), and Brecht's Epic Theater are only a few examples. Saints' plays in England and America after WWI took on these traits, very different from the introspective agonies of the suffering Decadent saints.

Maurice Maeterlinck's *Miracle of Saint Antony*, though written before the war, provides a contrast to works of the fin de siècle. It concerns a posthumous miracle of St. Anthony of Padua, a thirteenth-century Franciscan, known for his many miracles converting heretics. For this reason, he has become known especially as the saint to intercede for "lost causes." In the play, St. Anthony appears in the living world, looking like a beggar, answering prayers of his own pious supplicant. Drawing on medieval plays of the posthumous miracles of Saint Nicholas, Maeterlinck depicts Saint Anthony having come down from heaven to fulfill the prayers of an old servant to the even older Mademoiselle Hortense, who has lain dead three days. As he plainly puts it, he has come "to bring her back to life." Within moments, he is asked if bringing the woman back to life will affect the large inheritance left to Hortense's heirs. The issue of the inheritance becomes the central issue of the play as Antony raises Hortense and is subsequently abused and kicked out of the house. Even Hortense, in her groggy awakening, admonishes Anthony, believing him to be a beggar dirtying her home. When Anthony is finally physically removed from the home, he walks away, bewildered. The internal irony of the plot as well as the depiction of St. Anthony unable to redeem these "lost causes" points to a gulf between ritual practice and realistic motivation. The play initiates a

social commentary about hypocrisy while the humor makes it palatable to the audience in a manner characteristic of Shaw.

The contrast between Maeterlinck's St. Anthony of Padua and Flaubert's St. Antony is great—Flaubert's long play, filled with rational and material temptations, requires Antony to fight to exhaustion, while Maeterlinck's play leaves its protagonist in tacit acceptance of his rejection. Actively fighting against worldly temptations purifies Antony in Flaubert's play, while peacefully accepting the rejection and abuse of Hortense's family emphasizes the saint's purity in Maeterlinck's. The change is a subtle move toward saintliness in martyrdom rather than asceticism—even though Anthony has already died, at the end of the play, he is taken out of Hortense's home to be tried in court. One of Anthony of Padua's spiritual longings was for "the gift of martyrdom" (Dal-Gal). The exertion of Flaubert's character results in a victory over the darkness of the human soul, while the alienation of Maeterlinck's saint leaves the audience feeling indignation towards the family, and humiliation over their own association with a society that hypocritically, even absurdly, rejects what they believe is righteous. Maeterlinck's use of the absurd would be developed by such authors as Camus and Sartre and playwrights such as Beckett and Genet later in the century. Maeterlinck's revolutionary dramatization stars a saint rejected by society for his special abilities rather than one idealized for suffering in a separate, sacred space.

While Flaubert focuses on the saint and his temptations, Maeterlinck focuses on society, and on the audience. Therein lies the main distinction between saints' plays of the pre- and postwar periods. The saints' plays produced after WWI present heroes whose stories of alienation shift focus from themselves to the society in which they are

persecuted—a society, like that of the Classical chorus, representing the audience themselves. Echoing the Edwardian impression of artists as those with special sight, set apart from the masses by their abilities, many dramatists of the early twentieth century inscribe themselves as saints in their plays—whether it is Shaw as the only playwright to understand the true nature of Joan of Arc, Eliot's depiction of the faithful believer, or Stein's notion of artists' dedication to their craft mirroring the dedication of saints, these writers of modern saints plays between the World Wars portray themselves as exceptional. As Shaw put it in 1906, "The apostolic succession from Eschylus to myself is as serious and as continuously inspired as that younger institution, the apostolic succession of the Christian Church" (Weales 164). More than a decade before the end of the Great War, Shaw points to the inscription of artists as saints of peculiar, exalted vision, like that of the saint whom he would dramatize, Joan of Arc.

T.S. Eliot's 1914 poem, "The Love Song of Saint Sebastian," provides a clearer transitional example. The poem is an agonized, Decadent work describing Sebastian's self-flagellation and subsequent murder of one he loved:

> Then you would take me in
> Because I was hideous in your sight
> You would take me in without shame
> Because I should be dead
> And when the morning came
> Between your breasts should lie my head.
> I would come with a towel in my hand
> And bend your head beneath my knees; (lines 17-24)
> You would love me because I should have strangled you
> And because of my infamy;
> And I should love you the more because I mangled you
> And because you were no longer beautiful
> To anyone but me. (lines 35-39)

Many interpretations of the poem have been offered, including a complicated comparison to Iokanaan in Wilde's Salome (Riquelme), as well as notes about Eliot's sadism and homoeroticism, even a suggestion that the woman killed was Emily Hale, a woman Eliot courted (Kaye 108). However, in this as in most cases, the simplest reading seems clearest. Eliot's biographer considered his European vacation in 1914 to have been a time of "spiritual crisis" when, "he was circling, in moments of agitation, on the edge of conversion" (Kaye 108). Besides the veracity of the faith, the main consideration of a penitent considering conversion is sin and apostasy, often characterized as female, in accordance with the original sin of Genesis 3 having been committed by Eve. The speaker seems hideous to the character representing sin when he is repentant and he seems beautiful to her when his sinful, murderous passions soar. He loves her when she is dead and no longer a temptation—though the price us high, a forgiven sin is certainly beautiful to a penitent. Inscribing his own struggle, however perverse, into the dramatic monologue attributed to Saint Sebastian, Eliot inscribes himself as the saint (who is killed for converting so many Romans to Christianity). The celebration of depravity marks the poem's decadence, while the desire for freedom from it denotes the author's particular struggle. Marked by unique and sometimes heretical difference from bourgeois society, some dramatists of the period between the World Wars, particularly George Bernard Shaw and Gertrude Stein, saw themselves as saints, uncovering the reality of medieval saints for modern theatergoers. Stein used her unique, cubist vision to illustrate saints Theresa and Ignatius, and Shaw used his study of Joan of Arc's rehabilitation trial to uncover the truth about the maid, which he deemed absent from previous dramatizations.

The "notion that art could provide release from bourgeois anxieties" caused Americans to appreciate art "because it calmed them, provided them with respite from the constant demands of the modern superego" (Lears 191). Similar impulses may have led to a fascination with medievalism and primitivism. Their childlike sincerity made medieval saints seem to emanate from a separate world, unreachable by modern standards. But it is also true that medieval sincerity was not just a childlike state of grace: "In the lives of the saints, innocence was not always innate; it was sometimes won through force of will" (Lears 152). Henry Osborne Taylor claimed in 1902 that medieval Christian piety produced a unique emotional energy, not akin to figures of antiquity or modernity (Lears 161). So whether they were engrossed by childlike sincerity, force of will, or ecstatic energy of primitive and medieval saints, late Victorians and Americans at the turn of the century were enthralled with the virtues of an inaccessible world, very different from their own. Nineteenth-century art and drama exemplify this fascination, especially those works of the Pre-Raphaelites and Decadents described in this chapter. But drama after WWI would bring with it a changing attitude toward saints.

Robert Squillace describes a radical difference between perceptions of time in the late Victorian and Modernist periods. The late Victorians, he notes, view time as changing through history, each new adaptation of an older folk tradition expressing the circumstances of a new time period. This characterization describes the distance of saints depicted in nineteenth-century saints' plays—their piety and exercise of single-minded will arises in a distanced space, inaccessible to the audience, but relieving and attractive. Modernists, Squillace argues, view time as revealing "psychic" reality, with rituals of the past expressing components of those psychic realities, showing through a transparent

layering of time, as relevant now as then (Squillace 187-188). According to this model, "such twentieth-century authors as T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence and W.H. Auden believed folk rites embodied profoundly current psychological truths, [whereas] for Hardy such rituals represented an earlier stage in human development no longer accessible to contemporary man" (Squillace 172). Thus, the separate, spiritual space painted in the works of the original Pre-Raphaelites and in the Decadent saints' plays of Flaubert and Wilde was not required in dramatizations of saints after WWI. The three plays analyzed in subsequent chapters of this book each reveal methods by which the author is inscribed as a kind of saint, as if, henceforth, it would be art, and artists, who would function as substitutes for the sacred. All three playwrights seek to reveal the truth of the saints they depict rather than subscribe to historical accounts of their lives. Bringing their saints into the present day, Shaw, Eliot, and Stein provide their audiences with current-day models of saintliness rather than vestiges of perfection from another world.

CHAPTER III

SHAW'S SUPER(WO)MAN: JOAN OF ARC AND MODERN SAINTS' PLAYS

When the Church Militant behaves as if it were already the Church Triumphant, it makes these appalling blunders about Joan and Bruno and Galileo and the rest which make it so difficult for a Freethinker to join it; and a Church which has no place for Freethinkers: nay, which does not inculcate and encourage freethinking with a complete belief that thought, when really free, must by its own law take the path that leads to The Church's bosom, not only has no future in modern culture, but obviously has no faith in the valid science of its own tenets, and is guilty of the heresy that theology and science are two different and opposite impulses, rivals for human allegiance. (G .B. Shaw, The Preface to *Saint Joan*, 1923)

When Joan of Arc was convicted of heresy at the age of 19 in May of 1431, she suffered the death of an excommunicant at the hands of the secular community at Rouen. The court that convicted her, presided over by the Bishop Pierre Cauchon of Beauvais and a vicar of the Inquisition, is generally understood to have been corrupt, with intentions of releasing her to be burned from the start (Thurston). After leading the French army against the English at Orleans and leading the dauphin to Reims to be crowned, she was captured and sold to the English. Her final crime, after signing a recantation of which the contents may have been unknown to her, was to re-don masculine clothing, probably left to trap her, in the absence of any women's clothes. For this she was ruled a relapsed heretic and delivered to be burned at the stake. Twenty-four years later, the church conducted a rehabilitation trial, which annulled the previous ruling

of excommunication. In 1869, an appeal to the Pope by the Bishop of Orleans began her long road to beatification in 1909 and subsequent canonization in 1920 (Thurston).

Shaw's *Saint Joan* tells the biography of Joan of Arc after her departure from Domrèmy to find the Dauphin. It is called *A Chronicle Play in Six Scenes and an Epilogue*, and the Preface is longer than those six scenes put together. In the Preface, Shaw lays out his own understanding of Joan's voices, her looks, her trial and the Church. There can be little doubt that Joan's canonization in 1920 impelled him to write the play, which became a success in New York, London, and Paris.[13]

No other group of plays invigorated or redefined modern saints' plays more than those written in the 1920s depicting Joan of Arc. The reason for this is clear: While Joan had been dramatized in every era since her death, she was not canonized until 1920. The works of Shakespeare, Voltaire, Schiller, France, and Twain revered and reviled a religious and nationalist zealot, not a saint. When the Catholic Church completed the reversal of Joan of Arc's 1431 excommunication, canonizing her in 1920, the genre of modern saints' plays, including works by Flaubert, Wilde, and Maeterlinck, got a proverbial shot in the arm, spurring hundreds of representations in twentieth-century literature. Joan of Arc has remained one of the most varied and enduring figures of the Western literary imagination since she was first dramatized by Gilles de Rais just seven years after her death: She has been the conjuring witch, condemned heretic, girl soldier, virgin savior, national heroine, and patron saint of France. In 1920, two dramatic traditions that had lived separately since the 15th century converged—that of secular plays on Joan of Arc and that of saints' plays.

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[13] Daniel Gerould's "Saint Joan in Paris" reports the differences in production and reception of the play in London and Paris.

The Convergence of Shaw, Joan, and Saints' Plays

To understand the union of modern saints' plays and representations of Joan of Arc in Shaw's *Saint Joan*, one must first look not only to the historical character of both traditions but to the Shavism in which the play arose. The saint's play tradition features the works, antics, and (often posthumous) miracles of canonized saints whose personalities are associated with particular causes and predicaments. Reflecting the tales told in Voragine's *Golden Legend*, these plays valorized the saints, making inspiring religious and moral superheroes of them.

As medieval saints' plays hyperbolize the acts and characters of saints, plays about Joan of Arc also tend to depict her at extremes: As Louis Crompton puts it, they "fit clearly into one or the other of the infidel or fideist traditions" (Crompton 33). These categories separate works on Joan into camps that either reject or affirm the veracity of her spirituality. The most notable "infidel" works include "La Pucelle," a poem by Voltaire (1730) that ends with her marriage to Dunois rather than burning at the stake, and "The Life of Joan of Arc," a biography by Anatole France (1908). These works react largely to the fervor of "miracle-mongering" in the eighteenth century and the popular rehabilitation of Joan as spiritual hero that occurred when the modern translation of her annulment trial was published in the mid-nineteenth century. Acting in accordance with local anti-French sentiment, Shakespeare's portrayal of Joan in *Henry VI, Part I* rehearses Holinshed's *Chronicles*, portraying her villainously as a slut and witch.[14] Shakespeare's

[14] For a more detailed account of works on Joan of Arc that influenced Shaw, see Crompton's article, "A Hagiography of Creative Evolution." For a surprisingly complete list of works on Joan of Arc, see the Wikipedia entry for "Cultural Depictions of Joan of Arc" at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_depictions_of_Joan_of_Arc (Accessed October 18, 2012).

work is not technically "infidel" since he does give credit to her spiritual power—her diabolical spiritual power.

RICHARD PLANTAGENET (Duke of Gloucester).
Strumpet, thy words condemn thy brat and thee:
Use no entreaty, for it is in vain.
JOAN LA PUCELLE.
Then lead me hence; with whom I leave my curse:
May never glorious sun reflex his beams
Upon the country where you make abode;
But darkness and the gloomy shade of death
Environ you, till mischief and despair
Drive you to break your necks or hang yourselves!
[Exit, guarded]
RICHARD PLANTAGENET (Duke of Gloucester).
Break thou in pieces and consume to ashes,
Thou foul accursed minister of hell!

Here Shakespeare's Joan, caught in lies and curses, embodies a hellish witch who conjured demons to help win the battle of Orleans and who even denies her own virtue, claiming to be carrying a child belonging alternately to the French General and the King of Naples. Contrastingly, Friedrich Schiller's Joan in *The Maid of Orleans* (1801), as virginal as Shakespeare's depiction is wanton, actually dies on the battlefield, having subjugated her romantic love of a particular English soldier for the moral love of her country. Continuing in the fideist tradition after 1841, when Quicherat published transcripts of the annulment trial, Mark Twain penned his version of Joan in both a biographical essay and a fictional biography called *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896). Twain so adored Joan that he claimed he found "no blemish in that rounded and beautiful character" and gave a public speech in her honor, exhorting "the divine soul, the pure character, the supreme woman, the wonderful girl" (S. Ryan).

Eschewing the specific religious affiliations of Joan of Arc and instead emphasizing her vigor in pursuing a kind of "Holy War" against patriarchy, the women's

movement in England, and later in the U.S., adopted the image of Joan as an emblem (National Women's History Museum). She inspired a "divinely sanctioned militancy," giving women's protests a historical leader to rally behind. Her image appeared the cover of England's Women's Social and Political Union's *Suffragette* magazine, adorned flags to be used as banners in political marches, and inspired women to ride in full armor on horseback in both England and America. Joan represented a vigorous antipatriarchal struggle before her canonization in 1920, which brought with it complications for the fight against institutional discrimination (Sillup).

Shaw's portrayal of the saint as a super(wo)man does not stray far from her crusading feminist precedent, but it does bring a new critical dimension to traditional saints' plays, which typically portrayed the popular folk versions of the saints' feats. Neither infidel nor fideist, Shaw's conception of Joan defies the contrast, as his Saint Joan loves God and the church but bases her decisions on the personal judgment she makes in the wake of revelations from her "voices." Although his character attributes the voices to saints interceding for God, Shaw provides no transcendent verification. He is clearly skeptical of the veracity of Joan's claims but does not allow the questionable source of her personal judgment to nullify its significance or the heroic virtue of her character. In this way, he subverts the supposition of true religiosity inherent in saints' plays and refuses to take sides in the fideist–infidel controversy. In fact, Shaw demystifies Joan to the point at which she might be judged by her actions alone.[15]

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[15] This judgment "by works alone" bears direct contrast to the Protestant tenet of Martin Luther that humans will find justification "sola fide," by their faith alone—human works being insufficient to justify salvation through Christ's sacrifice. The contrast here sheds light on the highly secular version of ideal "Protestantism" Shaw advocates in the Preface, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

In the Preface, Shaw holds that because we judge human sanity not by the *method* that brings visions or voices but by the *messages* they convey, we must judge Joan (as we do Newton and Saint Catherine) to be sane. He writes that her voices "never gave her any advice that might not have come to her from her mother wit exactly as gravitation came to Newton," and thus she is no more irrational than was Newton. His argument, nevertheless, suggests that if the same method had brought her a less "sane" message, she would have been insane, there being no difference but the message. The weight of this analysis assigns credit for Joan's visions to her own psyche and away from divine power. In the same year Shaw wrote *Saint Joan*, a physician named Charles MacLaurin wrote that Joan's voices derived "as a delusional compensation for the girl's failure to develop sexually" (Sanders 207). Noting his awareness of such pronouncements, Shaw writes in the preface that Joan's voices "have been held to prove that she was mad, that she was a liar and impostor, that she was a sorceress (she was burned for this), and finally that she was a saint." Shaw's definition of "saint" accepts ambiguity about the origin of the voices that led Joan to act as she does. What defines the saint as opposed to the superman, per se, is the message and action produced and the Church's determination of them as defending the faith or not. In Joan's case, the Church found Joan's actions first to be heresy and later to be saintly. Shaw's argument with the Church stems from his understanding that the initial ecclesiastic court judged Joan correctly as proffering a heretical message. The Church condemned this court for corruption while Shaw claims that in order to validate the coronation of Charles, Church authorities changed their views of the origin of Joan's voices. For the Church, saintliness relies on the origin of saintly inspiration, while for Shaw, saintliness relies on the progressive nature of the revelation

and the saint's willingness to see it through to the end. Canonization exists only as the religious and legal acknowledgement of the saint. This secular understanding of saintliness as a form of progressive heroism allows Shaw to admire Joan as a superwoman and write her character in a positive light outside the fideist/infidel conventions of Joan of Arc literature.

Although hyperbolic exaggerations of saint's miracles and abilities were typical of medieval saints' plays, such exaggerations were hardly conventional in the theatrical naturalism and realism that rose to prominence in the nineteenth century. These new theatrical conventions encouraged the modernist practice of uncovering the plight of real lives from the veneer of appropriate social performance. As these plays realize the confining circumstances of wives and reveal the sins of fathers,[16] they criticize idealized institutions, like marriage. Similarly, modern saints' plays of the realistic theater in the early twentieth century work not only to demystify saints as subjects, but some work to criticize the Church as well. In the wake of Ibsen's realism, Shaw wrote plays for the realist stage,[17] employing character-driven dialogue in three-wall surroundings. While humorous, ironic, and satirical, Shaw's dramatic force owes much to Ibsen's realism. Reacting to the plethora of what he believed to be misrepresentations of Joan throughout history,[18] Shaw notes that MacKaye's 1906 heroine in *Joan D'Arc* was "'pitiable, sentimental, and in the technical melodramatic sense, sympathetic,' and about as much like Joan 'as Joan's kitten was like Joan's charger'" (Crompton 35). So, combining the

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[16] As in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*, respectively.

[17] As Martz puts it, "Shaw is writing, as he and Ibsen had to write, within the conventions of the modern realistic theater—conventions which Eliot escaped in *Murder in the Cathedral* because he was writing this play for performance at the Canterbury Festival" (153).

[18] He makes this extremely clear in the Preface to *Saint Joan*.

concept of the shunned hero and his own conception of Joan as a progressive super(wo)man, Shaw had his say on stages in New York and London in 1923.

The Superwoman Saint

In "The Quintessence of Ibsenism," Shaw describes his concept of the shunned hero, illustrated best in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*. At the end of Act I, having discovered proof of contamination in a water supply that would fill a new town bath, Ibsen's protagonist, Dr. Stockmann, exclaims, "I feel tremendously happy! It is a splendid thing for a man to be able to feel that he has done a service to his native town and to his fellow-citizens" (Act I). The discovery allows the protagonist to fulfill his role as town protector, as the scientist whose craft would save the populace from disease. In such a role, Dr. Stockmann struggles in honesty on the town's behalf, exhibiting a traditional, moral imperative: protecting people from certain physical harm. The ideally favorable aspect of his actions creates ironic tension as the townspeople gradually turn violently against him, attack him for stunting their commercial enterprise, and destroy his life.

The shunned hero who upholds the traditional morality of the people who denounce or exile him appears throughout literature from Plato and the Bible to Maeterlinck's 1904 *Miracle of St. Anthony*. Stockmann's final words in Ibsen's play distill the concept: "the strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone"—strength is often defined by those who remain faithful when all turn against them. Likewise, Shaw's Joan stands alone, unable to get through to her "society." As Obraztsova explains in "A People's Heroine," Shaw "summed up the results of his many years of reflection about a particular type of realist" in Joan. In her, Shaw incorporates

"his own enormous faith in the reason and strength of man, while honestly recognizing that what even the strongest and most intelligent person can do alone is insufficient in order to change society" (Obratsova 220). And while this image of the exiled hero provides a basis for Shaw's *Saint Joan*, in "The Quintessence of Ibsenism," Shaw reveals the extra weight of his own expectations for a superhero: that her ideas must exceed traditional moral character and look toward something entirely new.

Shaw's Joan must not, as Ibsen's Stockmann and Maeterlinck's St. Anthony do, hold steadfast to society's tradition-sanctioned moral ideal. She must represent something else—something unheard of, and even scandalous. As Brown puts it, "The Shavian hero lives by a higher ethic, unencumbered by traditional values and outdated moral codes (L. Brown, "Shaw" para. 10). The break with traditional moral codes as a point of heroism characterizes Shaw's concept both of the superman and of "Protestantism." In *The Perfect Wagnerite*, he describes the latter in terms that recover the radical individualism of its founders.

> Four hundred years ago, when belief in God and in revelation was general throughout Europe, a similar wave of thought led the strongest-hearted peoples to affirm that every man's private judgment was a more trustworthy interpreter of God and revelation than the Church. This was called Protestantism; and though the Protestants were not strong enough for their creed, and soon set up a Church of their own, yet the movement, on the whole, has justified the direction it took. Nowadays the supernatural element in Protestantism has perished... (Shaw, *The Perfect Wagnerite*, "Siegfried as Protestant" para. 2)

Thus, for Shaw, the category of "Protestant" lies not with any specific church or dogma but in the affirmation of private judgment over institutional dogma. It echoes the ideals of Martin Luther, whose proliferation of the concept of "justification by faith alone," rather than conformity with Pope or Church, redefined Christianity in the sixteenth century. It concerns an attitude of steadfast faith in God's forgiveness or justification for actions in

conflict with accepted moral codes or Church teachings based not on one's works, but on God's grace. While Shaw does refer to a specific, contemporary institution as "Protestantism," it is clear that he considers the concept and the institution two separate things. As he wrote, "The Protestants were not strong enough for their creed … the supernatural element in Protestantism has perished." Therefore, and confusingly so, the Protestant Church, which might be interpreted as high-Church Anglicanism, Lutheranism, or any other such institutionalized non-Catholic Christian denomination, is no longer characterized by Shaw's more radical concept of "Protestantism."

Illustrating his impression of Joan as a "Protestant" in a letter to Henry S. Salt, on July 16, 1923, Shaw wrote that Joan of Arc "warned the priest who was holding up the cross to her at the stake that if he did not jump down he would be burnt. [She was] quite a good humanitarian, and an early advocate of rational dress" (Laurence 843). He also notes that he mentioned her to G.K. Chesterton, whose very public conversion to the Catholic Church had recently been completed. Shaw notes ironically that the mention of Joan "elicited an outburst of rabid Protestantism from him," no doubt referring to Chesterton's confirmation of her virtuous martyrdom. For Chesterton to agree that Joan's loyalty to her voices in opposition to the ecclesiastic court constituted heroic virtue meant, for Shaw, Chesterton's unwitting support for the Protestant value of private judgment over the governance of Catholic leadership. Shaw goes on to claim, "Joan was burnt, quite correctly, for being a Protestant before the name was invented" (Laurence 843). Humanitarian, advocate of rational dress, and radical Protestant—these are the characteristics Shaw sees in Joan. Not a supplicant virgin, not a pastoral beauty or a

harlot-witch, but a shrewd, capable individual of extraordinary will, like John Tanner, the hero of his earlier work *Man and Superman*.

Drawing the saint as his own version of a superwoman, Shaw depicts Saint Joan as an innovator for whom the world is not ready. In *The Sanity of Art*, he remarks, "We cannot ask the superman simply to add a higher set of virtues to bend respectable morals, for he is undoubtedly going to empty a good deal of respectable morality out like so much dirty water and replace it by new and strange customs, shedding old obligations and accepting new and heavier ones" (Shaw, *Sanity* 288). He acknowledges that the "respectable morality" of man will appear to him as unnecessary refuse (Shaw, *Sanity* 288), as do the peerage and the intercession of the Church to Saint Joan in his play. Shaw writes that "The superman will certainly come as a thief in the night, and be shot accordingly" (Shaw, *Sanity* 288), as his Saint Joan is convicted "accordingly" for her crime of heresy. For Shaw, she embodies a new consciousness beyond conventional morality that will elevate humanity to a more meaningful existence—in this case, in direct communication with saints, the king, and God Himself. Joan moves beyond the station given her class and sex, crowning a king and defending a nation. In her defiance of the Bishop of Beauvais, the Earl of Warwick, and the Office of the Inquisition, she clings to the truth of her "voices," for which Shaw names her the first Protestant.

Shaw's character does not merely champion the pitiable, moral cause of protecting people from themselves as Ibsen's Stockmann did. She champions a cause that her King and fellow French officers do not recognize—she champions something no one else hears: the commands of her voices to fight for the freedom of France. She acts in a way she deems in accordance with her God, not her better, not her bishop. She dresses in

a way that defends her virtue, not a way that reflects the moral ideals of her contemporaries. In short, Shaw's Joan is a heretic, through and through. Her status as heretic contributes to Shaw's definition of a saint—she is progressive, steadfast to her private revelation of the will of God, and able to accomplish great deeds.

In a modern interpretation of saintliness, Shaw defends the heretic as saint—a forward-thinking pioneer, "the man who declares that it is right to do something hitherto regarded as infamous," and who is "stoned and shrieked at by the whole army." He writes, "They call him all manner of opprobrious names; grudge him his bare bread and water; and secretly adore him as their savior from utter despair" (Shaw, *Major Critical Essays*, 13). Here, Shaw reveals what he sees as a deep ambivalence in humans that propels them both to cast out the nonconformist and then secretly venerate him. Unlike Dr. Stockmann, who is respected, feared, and shunned for his steadfast adherence to traditional morality, the Shavian superwoman is shunned for the outrageousness of her claim that God has commanded her in her actions, which becomes the stimulus for her adoration only twenty-four years after her death. Joan of Arc's faithfulness to her voices, which reveal what she considers to be the will of God to her, constitutes the "Protestant" heresy for which she is martyred in Shaw's play and the heroism for which she is rehabilitated. In some respects, this concept of Protestant saint embodies the "scapegoat" archetype whose sacrificial persecution saves the community. Following the structure of the scapegoat narrative, Christ himself is persecuted, cast out, and then venerated for His sacrifice.

Saint Joan embodies Shaw's concept of a superwoman because she is condemned by the Church for her heresy, which is revealed actually to be brilliance as well as the

vehicle for her rehabilitation and veneration. She becomes the subject around which he writes this play, exposing the willingness of the Catholic Church to admit "private judgment" outside its traditional dogma.[19] Ironically, Shaw endeavors to illustrate that the Catholic Church is more willing to admit private judgment than the Protestant Church, which was founded on the principle. He uses Joan, whom he calls "The first Protestant and the first Nationalist," to reveal this aspect of Catholicism (Laurence 795).

The Protestant Saint

In a letter to Rev. Joseph Leonard in December, 1922, Shaw told his friend about his plans for writing *Saint Joan*:

> One of my missions in life is to make the Catholic Church conscious that it is more tolerant of private judgment than the Protestant persuasion, and to make the Protestant persuasion ashamed (if possible) of imagining that it grants a right of private judgment when it always attaches the condition that the private theologian must come to the same conclusion as his prayerbook. (Laurence, 798)

This "private judgment" about which Shaw writes concerns the ability of people to act in ways they personally deem to be in accordance with the Will of God outside the doctrinal contract binding the rest of the faithful. And if the Church recognizes (even canonizes) one person whose faith led her outside of orthodoxy, then the Church admits its fallibility, at least as regards that person.

> Thus, as revelation may come by way of an enlightenment of the private judgment no less than by the words of a celestial personage appearing in a vision, a saint may be defined as a person of heroic virtue whose private judgment is privileged. Many innovating saints, notably Francis and Clare, have been in conflict with the Church during their lives, and have thus raised the question whether they were heretics or saints. Francis might have gone to the stake had he lived longer. It is therefore by no means impossible for a person to be excommunicated as a heretic,

[19] Shaw devotes a section of the Preface to explaining the fact that occasionally the church may amend its prior condemnation of a heretic (like Galileo or Bruno), granting the personal judgment as honorable and admitting a mistake—admitting that its own original judgment was not inspired of God, but of a fallible human.

> and on further consideration canonized as a saint. Excommunication by a provincial ecclesiastical court is not one of the acts for which the Church claims infallibility.[20] (Shaw, Preface to *Saint Joan*)

For Shaw, an admission of personal judgment acts as a proverbial chink in the armor of Catholic orthodoxy, providing a possibility for evolution and diversity. And the most revolutionary part of Shaw's observations in the Preface of *Saint Joan* is that the Catholic Church might recognize that God's unique revelation to an individual surely indicates God's ability to draw a new covenant with *any* individual. For Shaw, then, the *just conviction* of Joan by a legal court of the Church is imperative—she must actually have been acting in a way denounced by church doctrine but championed by her private revelation in order to be a saintly superhero. If he shows that Joan's voices directed her outside traditional doctrine to act in true heresy for which the court was bound to find her guilty, he can expose a famous admission of personal judgment legitimized by the Catholic Church when it rehabilitated and canonized her. This admission would fulfill his desire to enlighten Catholics about their own doctrinal ambivalence, shame the stringency of Anglican Protestant doctrine, and affirm his own modern (and possibly secular) interpretation of saintliness at the same time.

Situated as he was within the confines of realistic theater, Shaw was compelled to make the content of his play factual, or, as Martz has pointed out, to give it at least the "appearance of facts" (Martz, "The Saint" 28). This aspect of modern saints' plays diverges greatly from the fantastic content of Voragine's legends and plays like those

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[20] The issue of infallibility in the Church was defined at the Vatican Council of 1868. How versed Shaw was in the actual dogmatic definition is not clear, but his notes do show that he was aware that only certain pronouncements of doctrine concerning faith and morals are held to be "ex cathedra" or infallible, according to the Pope's apostolic succession. The quotation notes that there is no infallible authority granted to a provisional ecclesiastical court, which may rule a person a heretic and excommunicate her, allowing the public to put her to death.

devoted to the posthumous miracles of Saint Nicholas. Shaw's study of Joan's rehabilitation trial provided him with material for his play and evidence for his argument. In preparing to depict evidence that Joan was "condemned as a heretic, which she was" (Laurence 795), Shaw explains that he "took care to avoid the histories, and read the process and nothing but the process" (Laurence 798). [21] He makes his case for the real guilt of Joan in a second letter to Father Leonard.[22]

> Imagine yourself a good Catholic in the Holy Roman Empire phase, and a strong Unionist, and an old gentleman with ordinary prejudices as to female propriety. You are confronted by a young woman under twenty, a rabid Sinn Feiner, who persists in wearing rational dress, or rather, dressing like a common soldier, who has had the audacity to crown a king in a cathedral as if she were the Pope and he Charlemagne, who insists that she has had visits from apparitions who told her to do these things, and who—crowning heresy!—has said again and again that she does not believe the Church's teaching that these apparitions are devils sent to tempt her to sin, and that (like a good Protestant) she considers these messages from God to herself of higher authority than the Church…And to all reproof and exhortation she is contumacious as the devil himself. (Laurence 799)

This vision of Joan, a vision prompted by what appears, at least in his letters, to be Shaw's actual understanding of Joan of Arc, constitutes the protagonist of *Saint Joan*. Quoting often from the trial notes, Shaw's play depicts that brilliant non-conformist of a superwoman, alternately shunned and admired. And, to portray the heretical Protestantism for which he so admired her, Shaw had to depict a fair court to find her guilty of that heresy.

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[21] Which means that he confined his study to Murray's 1902 translation of Quicherat's proceedings of Joan's rehabilitation trial, in isolation.

[22] In the first letter, he writes a version of the same story, but wholly without evidence. He even refers to Joan as having been canonized "In 1907 (I think)" (Laurence 795). His ignorance even of the decade of her canonization colors the veracity of his original narrative and seems to throw much doubt on his desire to come away from the actual transcript with anything but confirmation of the story he had already determined. As Shaw's contemporary Charles Sarolea puts it, "he reveals that deeper kind of ignorance of the writer who does not even know that he does not know" (95).

Shaw had an uphill battle on his hands as he prepared to show the court of Warwick and Cauchon in a just light. While much of Joan's dialogue comes directly from the trial notes,[23] Shaw builds his case for Joan as heretic through fictitious dialogue between The Earl of Warwick (Warwick) and the Bishop of Beauvais (Cauchon) who describe her heresy against both church and state. Significantly, they summarize:

> CAUCHON. I see now that what is in your mind is not that this girl has never once mentioned The Church, and thinks only of God and herself, but that she has never once mentioned the peerage, and thinks only of the king and herself.
> WARWICK. Quite so. These two ideas of hers are the same idea at bottom. It goes deep, my lord. It is the protest of the individual soul against the interference of priest or peer between the private man and his God. I should call it Protestantism if I had to find a name for it. (Scene IV)

In a description of a peerage-less king or priest-less God, the characters explain to one another their objection to Joan and their reasons for agreeing, "Well, if you will burn the Protestant, I will burn the Nationalist" (Scene IV). And yet Shaw takes pains to paint these two with moral character. They are not mercilessly out for Joan's blood as the English Chaplain, De Stogumber, is.

> WARWICK [rising]. My lord: we seem to be agreed.
> CAUCHON [rising also, but in protest]. I will not imperil my soul. I will uphold the justice of the Church. I will strive to the utmost for this woman's salvation.
> WARWICK. I am sorry for the poor girl. I hate these severities. I will spare her if I can.
> THE CHAPLAIN [implacably]. I would burn her with my own hands.
> CAUCHON [blessing him]. Sancta simplicitas!

Neither Warwick nor Cauchon, in Shaw's estimation, conspires to corrupt the court that would find Joan guilty.

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[23] See Tyson, *The Story of Shaw's Saint Joan*, for a detailed account of Shaw's study and use of the trial transcript.

While Joan's voice has been recovered in the transcripts of the annulment trial—a trial that ends with her restoration and the excommunication and desecration of Cauchon and Warwick—it is the voices of Cauchon, Warwick, and the Inquisitor that Shaw goes to great lengths to legitimize in his play. At the start of her final examination, the three expose their desires to conduct a fair trial.

> WARWICK. …I tell you now plainly that her death is a political necessity, which I regret but cannot help. If the Church lets her go--
> CAUCHON [with fierce and menacing pride]. If the Church lets her go, woe to the man, were he the Emperor himself, who dares lay a finger on her! The Church is not subject to political necessity, my lord.
> THE INQUISITOR [interposing smoothly]. You need have no anxiety about the result, my lord. You have an invincible ally in the matter: one who is far more determined than you that she shall burn.
> WARWICK. And who is this very convenient partisan, may I ask?
> THE INQUISITOR. The Maid herself. Unless you put a gag in her mouth you cannot prevent her from convicting herself ten times over every time she opens it. (Scene VI)

These speeches, crafted by Shaw to legitimize the court that condemns Joan, may represent his actual understanding of the people themselves, or, as Daniel Gerould suggests, it may be that "Shaw cleverly put his philosophical ideas into the mouths of fully human characters," enabling his own method "of saying the opposite of what the public expects" (Gerould 216). The lack of evidence for these conversations leads Martz to write, "There is no historical basis for his highly favorable characterizations of Cauchon and the Inquisitor" (Martz, "The Saint" 28). Gerould agrees, "Shaw suppresses facts that show the trial to be a conspiracy in order to make Cauchon a more effective contrast to Joan" (Gerould 216)—the contrast lies in Joan's Protestantism and Cauchon's Catholicism rather than the binary of saintliness and treachery an audience might expect.

In a Catholic court trying a Protestant, Shaw's Inquisitor and Cauchon must find Joan guilty of heresy, lest she lead souls of the faithful away from Christ's salvation. The

Inquisitor's long speech in Scene VI illustrates his understanding of heresy as a sort of slippery slope ending in hell. He claims that all heresy "begins with people who are to all appearance better than their neighbors," but ends in "a monstrous horror of unnatural wickedness left unchecked." In defense of the Church's harsh dealing with heresy, the Inquisitor explains, "if you hate cruelty, remember that nothing is so cruel in its consequences as the toleration of heresy," referring specifically to the damnation of an increasing number of souls tainted by the original heretic. Thus, the Inquisitor believes his judgment, finding innocence or punishing guilt, works for the greater good of the souls of humanity. Defending the treatment of Joan by the court in the Preface, Shaw goes so far as to report that, "The truth is that Cauchon was threatened and insulted by the English for being too considerate to Joan," which is surprising given that he is often accused of villainously condemning her despite his questionable jurisprudence in the case. Shaw's Cauchon tries multiple times to get Joan to deny her "voices," wear appropriate clothing, and come back into the fold of the church. But, as a good Shavian saint, Joan persists in her faithfulness until she briefly recants and relapses[24] before being condemned to the fire.

The fact of Joan's "Shavian sainthood" condemns her in the orthodox eyes of this play's court. Crompton describes the Shavian "Communion of Saints" in the style of Carlyle, consisting of mystical supermen[25] such as "Socrates and Mohamet," making it more like the inhabitants of the higher rings in Dante's *Inferno* than the Catholic Paradise

[24] Some readers make too much of this recanting. We have only to remember Peter's denial of Christ to find Biblical precedent for Joan's brief recantation and subsequent martyrdom.

[25] Stoppel's "Shaw and Sainthood" makes a case for Shaw's "saints" as constituted by both relentless striving for success in the progress of humanity and a sort of non-theological mysticism (183).

(36).[26] This conception of saintliness includes what Stoppel explains as the "indefatigable labouring after success" that "derives its significance solely from a vitalistic conception of human progress and development" (Stoppel 181). Shaw, whose concept of saintliness outside the Catholic or Anglican Communion of Saints echoes James's concepts of universal saintliness outside of any specific faith, takes sainthood here into a secularized space. Saintliness no longer must relate to anything spiritual. He confirms in the Preface that he regards Joan's voices as figments of her imagination, but not compromising her sanity. He insists that "her dramatic imagination played tricks with her senses," but it does "not prove that she was mad." Rather it shows that "she was none the less an able leader of men for imagining her ideas in this way" (Preface: "Joan's Voices and Visions"). Her saintliness, for Shaw, clearly lies in her martyrdom for the heroic values produced by her own "private judgment." Shaw sets his Joan up as the antithesis of Catholic orthodoxy and depicts the court as fair and even kind. In so doing, he clearly displays his own conviction to write his play in accordance with his original purpose: exposing the Church's admission of "personal judgment" by legitimizing Joan's conviction.

It bears noting that the Catholic Church of Shaw's day did not view Joan of Arc as a heretic-turned-saint and had condemned the bias of Joan's original trial in no uncertain terms. This is significant because the condemnation of the court that found Joan guilty of heresy means that she never was a heretic. And, what's more, Shaw knew this perfectly well. The letter he received from Father Leonard on December 14, 1922, told him as much, clearly refuting the veracity of Shaw's statements in the earlier letter that

[26] Interestingly, Metro Books' (New York) 2011 encyclopedia of saints also includes such individuals as Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

laid out his ideas about Joan, as of yet unconfirmed by his study of Quicherat or Murray (Laurence 797). In the online archive of Joan of Arc trial information, Allen Williamson provides, in detail, the evidence that Joan's relapse was certainly an issue of her re-donning male clothing to prevent rape, not insisting that she couldn't live in captivity, as Shaw's script suggests. This evidence is taken from the same transcript Shaw used as the basis for his script. One might draw the conclusion, then, that Shaw himself exhibits qualities similar to his own Saint Joan: he persists in remaining faithful to his own ideas for the progress of humanity in direct conflict with the judgment of the Church. Just as his Inquisitor attempted to unveil heresies in maids' clothing, Shaw attempts to unveil truths about the "Law of Change" being the "Law of God" by exposing the admission of private judgment in the Catholic Church. He uses the conventions of Ibsen's realistic theater to give veracity to his own interpretation of Joan as a Protestant saint, whose heresy condemned her and likewise proved her sanctity.

Shaw claims in the Preface to *The Sanity of Art,* "I deal with all periods; but I never study any period but the present" (Shaw, *Sanity* 5). Clearly, in *Saint Joan*, he employs the conventions of realistic theater to present a "history" that criticizes the Church of the present day. His personal definition of the saint as a progressive and mystical superwoman allows him to repurpose the saint's play tradition in a secular and critical form. Rather than mirror the cult of a saint as medieval saints' plays or inspire Catholic revival as Decadent saints' plays, modern saints' plays after the Great War became a tool for holding society up to itself and criticizing the institution responsible for canonization itself. In this way, *Saint Joan*, as a modern saint's play, co-opts the figure of Joan of Arc as well as the form of the saint's play in a subversive dramaturgy.

Brecht and the Victimized Saint

Further subverting conventions of the "present period," Shaw's superwoman departs from the growing popularity of representing Joan as a persecuted and ineffectual virgin martyr. While a warrior Joan of Arc in armor proved useful as a rallying image for the suffrage movement and recruitment during the Great War, once women gained the vote in 1920, that warrior image failed to meet the "it girl" factor of the New Woman. Having been canonized by a patriarchal institution, Joan's image lost something of its rebellious overtone, and her occupation outside the home played in opposition to public campaigns to reinvigorate respect for motherhood and homemaking (Blaetz 78-82). Portrayals of Joan both in theater and on film captured an increasingly passive and victimized young woman.

One such representation is found in Bertolt Brecht's *St. Joan of the Stockyards* (1928-31), which depicts the martyr as a pawn in the machinations of institutional power. Brecht's saint is Joan Dark of the meat packing stockyards of Chicago in 1931. The play is an early venture into what became his "epic theater" reflecting "sociological situations," critically exposing the gap between ideology and social function, between form and content, and between institutions and their practitioners. In the play, Brecht juxtaposes the blank verse of German classical drama and contemporary subjects of capitalistic society, thus "alienating" Joan from a "natural" reading by the audience. Such a natural reading would lead the spectator to view her in a fixed or determined character. Epic theater presents the world, historicizing characters in a way that allows the audience to view them no longer as "unchangeable, unadaptable, and handed over helpless to fate" (Brecht, "Experimental Theater" 15). It allows the spectator to feel a

kind of agency over the world and conditions around him, spreading "the world in front of him to take hold of and use for his own good" (Brecht, "Experimental Theater" 15). If the natural reading of Joan's story is as a warrior for France and martyr for the Church, Brecht paints her wholly differently: as a woman of potential whose work is eclipsed, trapped in a place where providing aid to poor meat packers only benefits the plant that abuses them.[27] Unmooring Joan from one historicized position and placing her in another suggests that Joan's struggle is based in conditions, not a particular time period. It suggests that women's agency may not have to be condemned to ineffectual work, as conditions need not be unchangeable. As Walter Benjamin put it, the fundamental attitude of one who writes for epic theater is that "it can happen this way, but it can also happen quite a different way" (Benjamin 8). While Brecht's script presents an ineffectual Joan, his theater would teach hope for change.

In the final scene of the play, Joan begins to understand that her philanthropy with the Black Straw Hats (read Salvation Army) has been used by Mauler (the owner of the packing plant) for his own ends, invigorating a new cycle of capitalistic production. Brecht shows here that even religious philanthropy can become a tool of bourgeois exploitation. In one of her final speeches directed to anyone who will listen (though no one does), Joan declares her epiphany: "But those who are below are kept below/so that those above may stay above/and the vileness of those above is measureless/and even if they get better that would be/no help, because the system/they have built is peerless:/ exploitation and disorder, beastly and therefore/past understanding" (Brecht, *St. Joan*

[27] Brecht explains in "Experimental Theater" that a "natural" reading is the one in which an audience feels the uninterrupted union of the character and narrative, inviting him in to experience the story.

121). The bifurcated world described by Joan is really one governed by an unfathomably demonic system that encompasses both those above and below. It is a hopeless situation in which the effort to bring about awareness is drowned by sheer vastness. Joan fails in her attempt to expose the gap between high and low and is condemned by religious and economic institutions in Brecht's play just as she is in Shaw's. Her failure brings about a kind of ingenuous canonization in both plays in which Joan becomes exalted by the very institutions that destroy her. By exalting and supporting Joan's philanthropy, the Black Straw Hats gain the support of the plant owner, who in turn finds a means of sustaining an exploitable workforce.

Inspired by unemployment and worsening conditions for workers in Germany in the 1920s, *St. Joan of the Stockyards* employs the medieval French voice of Joan of Arc in a secular, political drama set in Chicago, emphasizing not only the exploitation of the working class by capitalist ideology, but the global nature of that oppressed body of workers. In the post WWI era in which the borderlines of national boundaries in Europe were literally drawn on a map in the interest of the victors, it can hardly be surprising that an artist of such an international endeavor as Modernist drama would expose the nationless nature of the proletariat, reified in the body of the rejected saint.

While Shaw makes a joke of the ironic canonization of Joan by the church that condemned her, portraying Warwick, the Inquisitor and Cauchon with their proverbial tails between their legs in his epilogue, the implications of Brecht's epic drama are much more severe. Largely based on the narrative of Shaw's own *Major Barbara*, Brecht's *St. Joan of the Stockyards* employs the character of Joan of Arc to represent the humanitarian philanthropist who brings aid to the exploited, only to be exploited herself

by those who would begin the cycle of exploitation again. When the Church canonized Joan in 1920, her use as an icon of the women's movement waned as the canonization effectively ended her image as one of opposition to patriarchy (Sillup). In this way, even Joan's prominence as an image of suffrage was usurped by the Church. Brecht picks up this exploitation, blending Joan's story with that of Shaw's *Major Barbara*, including elements of his earlier 1929 musical *Happy Endings* (also based on *Major Barbara*) that premiered with in initial run lasting only seven days. *St. Joan of the Stockyards* played over Berlin Radio in 1932, but never saw a stage until 1959, after Brecht had dramatized Joan twice more.[28]

In *St. Joan of the Stockyards,* Joan of Arc acts as a hinge between the real world and its representation on the stage, drawing a tangible connection between Joan Dark's exploitation by the meat packing industry and Joan of Arc's exploitation by the English and the Catholic Church in 1920. Forced to see Joan of Arc as a victim of contemporary exploitation, the audience allows Brecht's epic drama to do its work of exposing the cruelty of worldly conditions and the possibility of changing them—of moving a determined history into an undetermined context. Bringing the medieval saint to life in a modern saint's play, Brecht universalizes the concept of sainthood, applying it in a secular narrative pointing to Joan's exploitation in order to move an audience through pity into a contemplation of new possibilities.

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[28] *The Visions of Simone Machard*, in 1942, based in France with Joan representing France in rebellion against the Germans, and *The Trial of Joan of Arc Proven, 1431*, in 1952, which animated the transcripts of her annulment trial in a radio drama.

Joan and Saints' Screenplays

While Joan of Arc's image worked as martyr, villain, and superhero on stage, it also worked to establish evolving interpretations of the saint in film. Free of the religious origins of drama and therefore the strong religious attitudes towards Joan as a subject, early films about Joan of Arc do not seem steeped in the fideist-infidel binary of earlier drama. Rather, they fluctuate between secular concerns, portraying her as a strong and defiant feminist or a victimized martyr who sacrifices herself for country, love and God's will. Having played a significant role in representing the rebellious suffragette in the marches and women's publications in England and America, the story and image of Joan of Arc, woman soldier and motivator martyred for her efforts, was a natural choice for filmmakers both before and after WWI. Many silent films, made in France, Italy, and the US between 1898 and 1928, feature the life of Joan.[29] Prominent pioneers in the film medium, Georges Melies (1900), Cecil B. de Mille (1917), Carl Theodore Dreyer (1928), and Marc de Gastyne (1929), portrayed her as variously transcendent and fearful, inspired and devastated. As Brecht's epic theater balanced theatrical experimentation and interpretive content, the silent films about Joan of Arc balance the new technology of filmmaking with their iconic content. Nearly all of the films tell the story of Joan's life, up to and culminating in her trial and martyrdom, except one: *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, a French film made by Carl Theodore Dreyer, a Danish filmmaker, in 1928.

Previous to Dreyer, Georges Melies made a short film called simply *Jeanne d'Arc*, providing more of a film spectacle than a history. One of the earliest films of Joan

[29] Blaetz reports nine by 1916, a year before DeMille's *Joan the Woman*.

of Arc,[30] it depicts her young visions, her quest for an army, the crowning of the Dauphin, and her subsequent capture, trial, execution and ascension, all in 10 minutes and 15 seconds. The hand-cranked camera moves the film at an unnatural pace, lending the final product a surreal quality, enhanced by the vibrant colors of hand-painted characters that seem to float through the "twelve tableaux" (Butler 114). The product seems to emphasize the newness of the medium rather than the interpretation of Joan. She is the Joan of Millet (1450), of Schiller (with the exception of the ending), of Twain (1895), even of the later Shaw (1923) —indistinct enough to be any of these. Though a magnificent artifact of early film, Melies's work depicts a cartoonish enactment of the classic story of Joan of Arc rather than the more interpretive, longer depictions in works like Cecil B. DeMille's 1917 *Joan the Woman*. With its emphasis on action, and dependence on the audience's familiarity with the story, it represents a dramatic form close to medieval Saints' Plays, though produced more to advance the medium than invigorate faith.

DeMille's film examines the life story of Joan as well, but, in its 138 minutes, is able to produce a much more realistic, deeper vision of Joan the woman. According to the filmmaker, his objective was to "emphasize the humanity of Joan of Arc rather than project the conventional image of a saint" (Butler 114)—an interesting note given that Joan would not be canonized for another three years. This Joan is clearly marked by a devotion to and fascination with her visions of the spirit world, whether they are her trusted saintly advisors or the feared, ghostly tempters who taunt her in her cell. Using current filming techniques, de Mille was able to differentiate between spirits and humans

[30] The only previous one, *The Execution of Joan of Arc*, by Hatot in 1897/8, remains only in a fragment in the Centre Jeanne d'Arc in Orleans.

by adding an element of transparency to them, while Melies was able only to elevate and color them. Besides this, the unconventional looks of the opera star Geraldine Farrar, who plays Joan, grants DeMille's vision an earthy realism than a "more ethereal" actress might have brought to the role (Butler 115). Despite DeMille's desire to downplay classic saintliness, he included a prologue and epilogue based in the French trenches of the Great War in which a vision of the spirit of Joan encourages a French soldier to volunteer to detonate a bomb in the German Trench. Her specter hovers over him as he dies from gunfire after his successful mission. Her sainthood blesses his sacrifice for the French effort against Germany. Because the film was released just prior to the US entry into WWI, the film was largely regarded as pro-French propaganda, though it also was regarded quite highly for its artistic achievement (Butler 114). Based on Schiller's *Jungfrau von Orleans*, the screenplay includes a romance between Joan and an English soldier, for whom she sacrifices her freedom. This aspect of the plot added a romantic heroism to the role, though when the film was re-edited for French audiences, this narrative was largely removed, changing not only the represented attitude toward the English, but the disposition of Joan's heroism. While the original film admitted an ambivalence between romantic love and inspired duty, providing American women with an appropriate call to sacrifice, the French version inspired national heroism and pride.[31]

Elements of Melies's film as well as DeMille's are echoed in Shaw's *Saint Joan*. Officially titled *Saint Joan: a Chronicle Play in Six Scenes and an Epilogue*, Shaw's play mimics something of the twelve "tableaux," of Melies's film. Each scene, or tableau,

[31] For a comprehensive analysis of DeMille's film and its French version, see Blaetz, Chapter 2, titled, "Joan of Arc Saved France, Women of America Save Your Country" (a line from the film).

provides a specific setting in the story of Joan's life. The external narrative of the prologue and epilogue of DeMille's film are reflected in the epilogue of Shaw's play, which also brings a postcanonization apparition of Joan to the stage. These frames were both criticized and considered an error (Butler 114), though Shaw was adamant about not removing the epilogue from performances. Portraying the strong and defiant Joan of the suffragette movement, Melies's film forms the resolve of Shaw's superwoman, despite her waning use as an emblem of feminism. Her beatification, canonization, and inappropriate message for a country whose mothers were needed back in the home on the return of men from the war all but halted Joan's use as an emblem of rebellion in the 1920s. Instead, films like Dreyer's 1928 film *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* emphasize her innocence and victimization. While Dreyer borrows his apology for Joan's accusers from Shaw, this may be all the two works have in common. Both dramatizations humanize the court of Joan's condemnation, but they do so with very different purposes. Shaw's super(wo)man must be condemned, proving her loyalty to her revelation and valor in rebellion against current moral attitudes, while Dreyer's film emphasizes her victimization by institutions whose evil oppresses even its own representatives as they are moved by her fall (Blaetz 86). While the inarguable center of Shaw's play is its feisty Joan, the star of Dreyer's film seems to be filmmaking itself, as is characteristic of Melies's and DeMille's pictures as well. Despite the pains Dreyer takes, as Shaw and Mark Twain before him, to be precise in his script by going directly to the trial's transcripts, the most memorable aspect of the film is its mysterious and disturbing quality, effected by unnatural camera angles and unprecedented long close-ups of Maria (Renée Jeanne) Falconetti and other members of the cast without make up.

Excruciating close-ups of Falconetti's tortured face convey the devastation of an innocent under siege, realizing defeat at the hands of trusted counselors. As one critic puts it, "never before, and seldom since, has the human face, in all its revealing and concealing mobility, been studied so relentlessly" (Butler 115). True, the image with which one comes away from Dreyer's film is decidedly not the triumphant youth in armor charging into or out of battle. Rather, it is a shaven head with a grimace of horror stricken across its face, eyes wide and starting, at once confused and hopeful, like caged prey, awaiting release. In this more than any of the other silent films, spectators feel the gag of the film medium stifling its protagonist, who speaks in vain as they must read her dialogue.

Besides the silence and close-ups of Falconetti's face, Dreyer's filmmaking features a set without right angles, evoking a nightmarish atmosphere. The jarring angles at which the actors are captured add to the dramatic quality of their appearance. Ebbe Neergaard "mentions that in order to obtain the many low-angled shots he wanted, Dreyer had holes dug all over the set for the camera to be placed in" which led to its comparison to "Swiss Cheese" (Butler 119). These extreme camera angles allow Dreyer to create a dramatic imbalance of power, the court often shown from far below and Joan from above, like a cowering animal.

Despite the decline in Joan's prevalence as a feminist hero, American women's response to the film was more extreme than expected, a large percentage of them recorded to have walked out of the film in disgust. This spiritual yet "pathetically victimized Joan" (Blaetz 88) failed to inspire its audience, presenting her martyrdom in a more realistic portrayal than works of the past. Blaetz notes that American poet H.D.

"was both astounded and appalled by the film," characterizing it as "remorseless," explaining that each woman holds Joan of Arc in the "secret great cavernous interior of the cathedral (if I may be fantastic) of the subconscious." In contrast, this Joan is not "our" Joan, but a "much better, more authentic" Joan (Blaetz 88). Like Brecht's *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, written during the same years as Dreyer's film, this Joan succumbs to her lack of worldly power with little reference to a spiritual victory. The agony of such a devastating outcome plays on the faces of the court, which lack, as they do in Shaw's *Saint Joan*, the vindictive revenge of DeMille's villains. The court seems as upset about their inevitable villainy as Joan does about her impending death. This saintliness seems to distinguish itself in the revelation of oppression not only by institutions, but fate. In a Jobian vein, Joan of Arc's image in the 1920s moves popular saintliness from the active hero to the innocent victim. The lasting impact of Dreyer's work is indicated by its archiving in the illustrious Criterion Collection—the only one of the silent films on Joan of Arc to be so distinguished. Overcome by human decisions about sacrifice and outcomes, this Joan epitomizes the evolving image of saints in Modern Saints' Plays of the 1930s. As the work of Eliot and Stein will show, impressions of universal saintliness become increasingly contemplative of worldly contexts in the art of the 1930s.

CHAPTER IV

ELIOT'S BECKET: RECONCILING CHURCH AND STATE

"The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order." (T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 1919)

Shaw may have had the last word in the progression of dramatic supermen begun by Wagner and Nietzsche, but certainly he didn't have the last word on dramatic *heroes*. While all of Aristotle's dramatic theories were tested and transgressed in the twentieth century, most dramas still incorporated a protagonist whose character arc derives from the narrative movement of the play. The foundation of classical heroism displayed in Western theater is overtly manifest in the neoclassical dramatic revival that thrived in France near the middle of the twentieth century. T.S. Eliot noted this throng of popular plays in a 1953 letter to Lord Samuel of the Classical Association (who discussed Eliot's plays in his presidential address), writing, "I do not know whether it is pertinent for your purpose to call attention to the uses made of Greek drama on the contemporary French stage. The first important example within my memory was Jean Cocteau's *La Machine Infernale* (1932), a new version in contemporary French idiom of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. He was followed by other dramatists, notably Giraudoux, and more recently, Anouilh in *Antigone* (1944), as well as Sartre in *Les Mouches* (1943)" (Tanner 123). When Eliot himself gave his presidential address to the Classical Association, he spoke of the

education of Shakespeare and Milton, noting, "a classical education is the background for English literature of the past" (Tanner 123). Thus, although Karl Young argues for the independent evolution of European drama in the Middle Ages from the liturgy of the Catholic Mass,[32] it is hard to deny that poetry in England has relied on classical allusion since the advent of Middle English. We need only look to Chaucer for confirmation. There can be no doubt that Roman colonization of Britain brought with it the dual current of Classics and Christianity long before any literature in what might be recognized even as Old English was produced by Anglo-Saxons. Any development of an English tradition[33] must necessarily include both of these strains, reinvigorated by the Norman invasion in 1066. Given Eliot's insistence on the significance of tradition as a context for the work of an individual artist, notably in his 1919 essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," it follows that in composing his modern saint's play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, for the Canterbury Festival of 1935, he would draw deeply on the roots of both classical Greek drama and British medieval liturgical and religious dramas.[34] Indeed, besides portions of Greek and Catholic dramatic forms, Eliot's play includes verse and prose, liturgical and vernacular religious drama, ritual and spectacle, as well as binary elements

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[32] This evolution began with the use of multiple voices in "tropes" within the Easter liturgy, with no connection to Greek precedence.

[33] Although T.S. Eliot was born American, I use England and English here as his "country" partially because of his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism and his naturalization in 1927 and partially because the commissioning and subject of the play are so completely English.

[34] In "On the Alterity of Medieval Religious Drama," Rainer Warning and Marshall Brown describe the structural distance between the Biblical, morality, and saints' plays of the middle ages (religious drama) and the liturgical drama that grew out of the *Visitatio Sepulchri* dialogues in the Easter mass (in which Mary Magdalene visits the empty tomb of Christ). While Karl Young (*Drama of the Medieval Church*) described an organic evolution of drama from the ritual and ceremony to platforms external to the church building, Warning and Brown describe two separate genres identified by participation or lack of participation by the audience, as well as language, subject matter, and place.

of the temporal and eternal, sacred and secular. The multivalent dramaturgy rings with a veritable cacophony of voices, much like the Greek dithyrambs and early liturgical tropes from which Western theater itself was born. And in this tempest resembling the diversity of our own culture and age, Eliot proposes that peace may be achieved by the choice of the martyr—an eye in the storm of human suffering. His presentation of St. Thomas Becket shows a contemporary audience how a mortal man might wield the peaceful power of eternity by submitting his will to God's. Unlike Nietzsche's or Shaw's heroes, Eliot's submits his will rather than persist. Unlike Greek heroes whose tragedy is augmented by hubris, Thomas overcomes his pride in surrendering his will to God's. Thus Eliot brings elements from all dramatic history together in a modern saints' play intended to provide its audience with the hope of peace through a reintegration of religion and politics.

The Canterbury Festival

The play was commissioned by George Bell for the Canterbury Festival of 1935—a festival of antiquity reestablished in 1929 when Bell was Dean of Canterbury before his appointment as Bishop of Chichester. It would be performed at the festival in the Chapter House of Canterbury Cathedral, giving it a vaguely liturgical setting and providing the assumption of a likewise religious audience prepared to assume the sainthood of Becket. Despite its religious origin, *Murder in the Cathedral* moved to secular venues immediately after the festival, running for several months at the Mercury Theater of Notting Hill Gate in London. The play was well received in theaters and on television, broadcast by the BBC in its first few months of programming in December, 1936 (Bally; Browne 68). Like *Saint Joan*, *Murder in the Cathedral* was made into an

award-winning black and white film in 1951, which has since been lost. The subject matter for his entry at the festival was somewhat prescribed, though the play of the previous festival focused more on the relationship of Henry II and his son than on the most prominent saint of Canterbury. So, while the saint in question may have been given, Eliot chose to write a saint's play out of his own devotion to contemporizing forms of the past. He expresses both Saint Thomas and his own saint's play in the traditional religious and ritual dramas of Greece and Britain. At the same time, he incorporates the individual challenge faced by every human, to choose God's will over his or her own.

The scope of the action in *Murder in the Cathedral* reveals much about the tradition Eliot incorporates in the play. He makes the conscious decision loosely to maintain Aristotle's unities, limiting the action, time and place. The place is distinctly limited to Canterbury, from Thomas's return in Part I to the final chorus of Part II. But just as Agamemnon's return carries with it impressions of human sacrifice in distant rough seas and the Messenger in *Oedipus Rex* brings stories of far off Corinth, Becket's return from France carries with it the stormy history of his relationship with Henry II, conversion to the priesthood, and excommunication of Bishops faithful to the king. By maintaining the classical unities, Eliot loses nothing of the larger scope of Becket's history, and gains the artifact of classical drama integral to the literary past of England.

Besides maintaining classical unities, Eliot admits in "Poetry and Drama," "I did not want to increase the number of characters, I did not want to write a chronicle of twelfth-century politics, nor did I want to tamper unscrupulously with the meagre records as Tennyson did" (Eliot, "P&D" 86). While the Knights, Priests and Becket himself are the only characters from the historical story to appear in the play, Eliot's choice to limit

the drama to the day of Becket's return from France, his sermon on Christmas day, and the day of Becket's death is made possible by the popularity of his story in legend, prayer, and drama over the near millennium since his death. Having been canonized a martyr and saint within three years of his death in 1170, Thomas Becket was a popular saint, named the "Protector of the secular clergy" (those clergy not cloistered), as well as a cultural hero of the people, celebrated throughout Europe (Thurston). Just as the cultural legend of the house of Atreus colors the *Oresteia*, and the legend of the Golden Fleece lends depth to the *Medea*, prior drama and legend provide Eliot with a story whose details are not in question. The previous three Canterbury Festivals featured narratives of the life and times of Thomas Becket, two of which were Tennyson's play of 1884, which was made into a silent film in 1923. Tennyson's play dramatized the period just before Becket's ordination until his death, while Eliot's play includes three scenes from the last month of his life.

The play's limited scope allows Eliot to "concentrate on death and martyrdom" (Eliot, "P&D" 86) and also largely to avoid emphasis on the sticky point that Becket died defending the temporal powers of the Roman Catholic see of Canterbury against the English monarch, who became the head of the Protestant Church of England in the sixteenth century. The Archbishop of Canterbury was traditionally the called the "primate" of England, holding the highest Roman Catholic office in Britain since Pope Gregory the Great sent St. Augustine to Kent in 597, making him an Archbishop once the original cathedral was built. The cathedral remained a center for Benedictine monks until Henry VIII dismantled the monastery in 1540, converting the Cathedral to the Church of England. Thus, the Cathedral of Canterbury in Eliot's day was not (and still is not) a

Roman Catholic cathedral, dedicated to the rule of the Pope over the English monarch. Eliot, by focusing his drama for the Canterbury Festival on death and martyrdom, chooses to foreground the faith of Canterbury's patron saint rather than his stormy relationship with the English king, which constitutes the action of most dramatic works on Becket.

According to Martin Browne, who produced all of Eliot's plays, Bishop Bell saw the commissioning of new plays as "the purpose towards which [the festival] must move if it were to play any effective part in supplying the greatest need in the collaboration of drama and the Church, the need for creative writing" (Browne 35). Being the first playwright commissioned to write an original drama for the festival, Eliot became part of a renewed effort "to encourage each new generation of writers to see anew for itself the relationship between the life of man and his faith." In fulfilling this effort, Eliot wrote a play that satisfied many requirements: It provided its audience with an example of moral fortitude in the face of contemporary secularization; it preserved the cathedral's historical association with resistance of political tyranny; and it portrayed Canterbury's most famous inhabitant as a complex, human subject whose struggle reflects the reasoning of modern, complex thought.

Making Becket an Everyman

Like Shaw's Joan, Eliot's Becket faces the crisis of personal moral conviction in opposition to cultural fashion. Eliot accomplishes this without specifically emphasizing Becket's Catholicism. "By removing the Catholic framework of medieval sainthood, and concentrating on morality rather than belief," Protestants could "transform saints into acceptable models for reviving the bourgeois ethic of self-control" (Lears 153). And

rather than elevating moral vigor as a tool of segregation and elitism, Eliot offers it as the end of every human's struggle to live well and make the right decisions "for the right reasons." Lears elaborates, "what had once appeared as intolerance emerged anew as healthy moral enthusiasm" (Leers 153). When Thomas chooses to maintain his decisions despite sure death, he does so in "a moment of timeless reality" (Martz, "T.S. Eliot" 18), which relieves the narrative of its particular temporality and keeps Thomas's choice relevant to the modern audience.

Historically, monarchs of England had a sore spot in Canterbury: Archbishop Anselm under Henry I managed to win the negotiation over investiture by allowing for the primate of Canterbury to vow homage to the King; Thomas Becket refused (among other things) to re-communicate Archbishop Roger of York after he presided over the coronation of the young king, Henry II's oldest son, which was the right of the Archbishop of Canterbury; and finally, Archbishop Cranmer entered office prepared to sacrifice ties with Rome in order to make Henry VIII head of the church in England and was executed by the Catholic Mary I for heresy. Of these three archbishops, only Thomas was martyred for defending the power of the Pope in executing the will of God over the English monarch—a subject that could distract from his heroism in a Chapter House of the Church of England, where the play was originally staged. Although his audience will know Becket's political history, relieving the narrative of the political weight helps Eliot generalize the suffering and victory of the martyr while circumventing the specifics that might inhibit the impact of Thomas as their moral model. This evasion stands in specific opposition to Shaw's *Saint Joan*, in which the playwright relied on details of the politics in order to define the specific hypocrisy of both the Roman and Anglican churches he

wished to criticize. Besides making the narrative personally relevant to its audience, relieving its narrative of specific politics enabled Eliot to emphasize Canterbury's history of resistance to political tyranny in general. For a right-wing political conservative like Eliot in 1934, moral resistance to political tyranny would have included resisting communism's antireligious stance as evidenced by the descent of Bolshivism into violent totalitarianism under Stalin. For Eliot, it also meant opposing the extremism of fascist ideology, quickly gaining strength in Germany and Spain (Stevens). The resulting hopefulness of the drama provided a "renewed receptiveness to the promise of Christianity" in resisting tyranny in postwar Germany (Däumer).

Eliot's decision not to dramatize specific political details focuses his play intimately on Thomas's sacrifice while Shaw's *Saint Joan* exploits specific details in order to criticize what he sees as the hypocrisy of the Catholic and Anglican Churches. However, they both attempt to reveal the authentic saint, relying heavily on eyewitness accounts. And while Eliot claims in "Poetry and Drama" that he "didn't want to increase the number of characters" in his play, Eliot does add two groups of characters that crystalize his reliance on the traditions of medieval and Greek drama. These groups of characters serve to define precisely Becket's moral predicament for Eliot's audience in the traditions responsible for the evolution of contemporary British theater. His addition of the Tempters in Part I evoke the allegorical figures of medieval dramas, such as Death in *Everyman*. His addition of the chorus provides the most obvious correlation with Greek drama. The chorus appears immediately in the play, opening the Agon, or Part I. When he explains the reasons for his heavy reliance on the chorus, Eliot notes, "The first was that the essential action of the play—both the historical facts and the matter which I

invented—was somewhat limited" and the second was that as "a poet writing for the first time for the stage," he was more "at home in choral verse than in dramatic dialogue" (Eliot, "P&D" 86). And while he admits that the chorus, "reflecting in their emotion the significance of the action," helps fill out the limited action, he does not explain the more purposeful role of the chorus: to represent the audience in the action of the play. The involvement of the Chorus as a body of witnesses to the play, interacting with the protagonist and yet not moving the plot, brings the audience into a space of shared ritual as the congregation at a mass. Through the choral verses, the audience participates in the ceremony of a liturgical drama. D.E. Jones explains, "With and through the Chorus, we of the audience are invited to participate in the celebration of the act of martyrdom and to accept the sacrifice of Thomas as made in our behalf" (Jones 62). Of the poetry, Eliot explains, "the audience should find, at the moment of awareness that it is hearing poetry, that it is saying to itself: '*I* could talk in poetry too!' Then we should not be transported into an artificial world; on the contrary, our own sordid, dreary, daily world would be suddenly illuminated and transfigured" (Eliot, "P&D" 87). The poetry should maintain an "unconscious" quality, not bringing attention to itself as poetry, but simply engrossing the audience in the play (Eliot, "P&D" 77). His specific formulation of poetry is intended "to bring home to the audience the contemporary relevance of situation" (Eliot, "P&D" 85), not miring it in archaic or anachronistic points of view. Thus, he employs a technique that is the opposite of Brecht's Epic Theater—rather than creating an alienating distance between the audience and narrative in order to hold it up as an object for reflection, Eliot seeks to draw the audience in, to bring the audience, through the character of the chorus, into the world of the play. This submission of the audience to the

language of the play illustrates one of its main points: the perfection of the saint's will in submitting to God. Through the structure, language, and narrative of *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot establishes a space of personal reflection illustrative both of a historical moment in the making of a particular saint and of the universal temptation faced by all who would be faithful to God's will.

Models and Scope

The models on which Eliot draws in crafting *Murder in the Cathedral* are a matter of much criticism and even debate. His adherence to certain sources establishes the tradition in which Eliot writes, while his departure from others establishes the contemporary moment he wishes to effect. Just as Shaw admits that he never "studies any period but the present" (Shaw, *Sanity* 5), Clifford Davidson argues that Eliot's work "is designed to bring the saint's play of the past into the present and to make it relevant to the full range of human experience in our time" (Davidson, "T.S. Eliot" 136). Eliot writes the play "not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence" (Eliot, "Tradition" 38). Although many of his influences must be deciphered, Eliot admits to a few of them, most notably *Everyman* and plays written for the three previous Canterbury Festivals. In the section dedicated to *Murder in the Cathedral* in "Poetry and Drama," Eliot expresses his desire not to produce a chronicle play of twelfth-century politics, such as *The Young King*, written by Lawrence Binyon for the Canterbury Festival in 1934, the year before Eliot's play would debut. *The Young King* illustrates the relationship of Henry II and his crowned son, the "Young King," whose coronation by the Bishop of York rather than

Canterbury caused so much trouble for Becket. Eliot's use of the term "chronicle" may have been intended to show opposition to Shaw's *Saint Joan*, whose complete title is *Saint Joan: A Chronicle Play in Six Scenes and an Epilogue*. Shaw uses the term ironically in his title, as a "chronicle play" refers to plays that evolved out of medieval morality plays that are intended to enhance nationalism by depicting the demise of those in rebellion and the prosperity of those in accordance with the king or government (which Joan definitely was not). Since Becket was martyred in opposition to the King, a traditional chronicle play would propose the opposite of what both Shaw and Eliot propose: that opposition to temporal power is saintly if it is the will of God.

Additionally, Eliot writes, "Nor did I want to tamper unscrupulously with the meagre records as Tennyson did." Tennyson's *Becket* (1884) had been produced for the festivals of 1932 and 1933. While there are many ways in which Eliot's play differs greatly from Tennyson's, there are also many notable similarities. Eliot only mentions that he wants to avoid the fictitious portions of the plot Tennyson invents about Rosalyn, Henry II's mistress, possible fiancée, and true love, in opposition to his French wife, Eleanor, whom he despises but to whom he is bound (these are the plot points that "tamper unscrupulously with the meager records"). Just as Shaw relied on the trial transcripts for his play, once Eliot decided to focus the action of his play to Becket's death and martyrdom, "he adhered faithfully to the outline, and often to the detail of the events described by contemporary witnesses" (Boulton 75). Interestingly, the outline of actual events still allowed Eliot to invent large portions of the play, including the Temptations of Part I and the speeches of the Knights in Part II. This "tampering" accomplishes an end very similar to Tennyson's: Rosalyn acts as a foil to Eleanor, the

pair of whom act as Henry's dual loyalties parallel to Thomas's dual loyalties of church and state. Henry cannot maintain loyalty both to his wife and lover, while Thomas cannot maintain loyalty to both his church and king. Eliot draws his fictitious Tempters of Part I in parallel to the Knights in Part II. In both plays, the fiction acts to enhance the tension of the plot by increasing the temptation of the "wrong" or immoral choice. And while Tennyson's parallel shows a contrast between the choices of Henry and Thomas, Eliot's provides a possible contrast or comparison with the audience's choice to act as Thomas, overcoming temptation, or to give in to secular arguments. While Tennyson's play with its overwrought poetry and romantic intrigue maintains its narrative distance from a spectating audience, Eliot's inclusion of the audience as participants in his play (represented by the Chorus) lends credence to the argument that it hovers between religious drama and ritual. In any case, purporting that Eliot maintained loyalty to the facts of the case is nearly as dubious as Shaw's claims that he did so. Rather, it seems clear that Eliot used the facts as a basis for his play, not as a script.

In addition to Greek elements and the history of Becket's case, Eliot attempts to employ the sound of the medieval vernacular religious drama in his play. In "Poetry and Drama," Eliot discusses crafting the verse in *Murder in the Cathedral*, noting that he leans on the versification of *Everyman,* "hoping that anything unusual in the sound of it would be, on the whole, advantageous" (Eliot, "P&D" 85). He attempts to evoke the sound of Becket's medieval language without actually employing an unintelligible dialect. Also, "an avoidance of too much iambic, some use of alliteration, and occasional unexpected rhyme, helped to distinguish the versification from ['the limitation to a strict blank verse'] of the nineteenth century" (Eliot, "P&D" 85). He admits that he "keeps in

mind" the sound of *Everyman* in order to evoke an appropriate avoidance of the wrong time period, but Eliot draws much more from medieval religious drama. The character of medieval religious drama with its inclusions of allegorical characters[35] such as "Death" or "Good Deeds," certainly makes its way into the play in the bodies of the Tempters. Besides this mythological character, Eliot includes dramatic elements of the saint's play tradition for medieval church festivals.

Although no script of a saint's play about Thomas Becket escaped the Reformation,[36] it is fairly clear that Eliot was familiar with the two extant saint's play scripts in middle English: The Digby *Mary Magdalene* and *Conversion of Saint Paul* (Davidson, "T.S. Eliot" 125). Eliot's three-part drama mimics the three parts of the *Conversion of Saint Paul*: 1. the discussion of Saul's mission to go from Jerusalem to Damascus in order to suppress the heresy of Christians, 2. the road to Damascus that includes his conversion, and 3. the arrival in Damascus that includes a lengthy sermon on the seven deadly sins. Eliot's play includes 1. Becket's arrival in Canterbury and confrontation with the Priests and Tempters, 2. the Interlude sermon, and 3. the entrance to the cathedral, murder, and exhortations of the Knights. As God speaks to Saul in the central portion of the Conversion, so we see Thomas, raised on the pulpit delivering his sermon on martyrdom after his victory over the Fourth Tempter. In the final part of both plays, the protagonist proceeds to the destination where a persecution will take place. The medieval precedent for a three-part drama is certainly not confined to the *Conversion*

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[35] Allegoraical characters such as Death or Good Deeds in *Everyman*.

[36] For a detailed description of sources revealing the existence of medieval saints' plays on Thomas Becket, as well as replete analysis of Eliot's play as it relates to English saint's plays and Christian ritual, see Davidson, "*Murder in the Cathedral* and the Saint's Play Tradition."

of Saint Paul. In fact, it is ubiquitous throughout Near Eastern mythology as it portrays the basic mythology of the resurrected God, whether that be Baal, Dionysus, Jesus, or Osiris, whose cult's reenactment of his famous death, dismemberment, and reestablishment by Isis may have been the world's first ritual drama (Jacobus). In Eliot's case, the three-part drama may represent the saint's temptation, perfection, and martyrdom, even as Dante's *Inferno*, *Purgatorio,* and *Paradisio*.

While Eliot only actually discusses *Everyman* and nineteenth-century influences in "Poetry and Drama," many critics have focused on additional models for the text of *Murder in the Cathedral*. As Tanner notes, Eliot has been forthcoming about the classical basis of his later plays. *The Family Reunion* is based on *The Oresteia*, *The Cocktail Party* on *Alcestis*, *The Confidential Clerk* on *Ion*, *The Elder Statesman* on *Oedipus at Colonus*. While the French dramatists on which Eliot commented in his correspondence with Lord Samuel before his Presidential Address to the Classical Association in 1953 also relied on Greek models for their works, Eliot writes,

> But the method of all these French dramatists is in some ways diametrically the opposite of mine. They have retained the names of the original characters and stuck rather more closely to the plots of the original dramatists, the innovation being merely that the characters talk as if they were contemporary French people, and in some cases employ what one might call anachronistic allusions to modern life. The method that has appealed to me has been rather to take merely the situation of a Greek play as a starting point, with wholly modern characters, and develop it according to the workings of my own mind. (Tanner 124)

The workings of Eliot's mind, as he hints in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," includes a complex enmeshing of past and present models as well as the artistic creativity of the writer himself. Despite the fact that most critics note the presence of multiple influences on *Murder in the Cathedral*, most focus only on one. Clifford Davidson has

analyzed the medieval saint's play elements in the play,[37] Martz, Leach, and Tanner focus on its Greek models,[38] while Ayers presents the ways in which it resembles the Catholic Mass.[39] Leach and Tanner both make logical and compelling arguments for Agamemnon as a model for the action of *Murder in the Cathedral*. Heroes returning from overseas, speeches to the audience by the protagonist, and murder in the final act followed by arguments for its legality all comprise parallels between the plays. Martz argues that the situation, action, and tone of Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus* is analogous to Becket's in *Murder in the Cathedral*. What seems clear though all of these analyses is that the saintliness of the hero of *Murder in the Cathedral* distinguishes him from the Aristotelian tragic hero. The tragic death of the classical hero must ensue from his hubris, his flaw of pride, while the death of the saint avoids tragedy because the martyrdom glorifies God, proceeding from the perfection of the saint's will, rather than his flaw. The Greek hero's pride blinds him to his own weakness, while the saint's pride is only in God, and therefore not bound to the imperfections of human weakness. It comes as no surprise, then, that in Eliot's play, Becket wavers on only one point.

The Last Temptation

As many critics agree, the first three Tempters, corresponding to the pleasure of friendship, and the power of allying himself with the King and of undermining the power of the monarch, do not actually tempt Thomas (Fergusson 30). He has already conquered these temptations. As he says with finality to the Third Tempter, "To make, then brake,

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[37] Davidson, "*Murder in the Cathedral* and the Saint's Play Tradition."
[38] Martz, "The Saint as Tragic Hero: Saint Joan and *Murder in the Cathedral*," Leach, "Agamemnon as a Source of *Murder in the Cathedral*," and Tanner, "The Dramas of T.S. Eliot and Their Greek Models."
[39] Ayers, "A 'Liturgy Less Divine.'"

this thought has come before,/ The desperate exercise of failing power./ Samson in Gaza did no more./ But if I break, I must break myself alone" (Eliot, *Murder* 35). He knows that it is his own will that must be broken in order for him to gain glory for God.

Before the entrance of the Tempters, Becket has perceived and defeated the temptations of earthly comfort and power offered to Jesus by Satan. And though he does overcome the Fourth Tempter, Becket has failed to foresee the manner in which the third temptation of Christ—that of usurping the glory of God on Earth by circumventing Him and worshipping Satan—will appear to him. Thomas has no doubt that he will eschew worshipping Satan. But the Fourth Tempter describes Thomas's plan this way: "Seek the way of martyrdom, make yourself the lowest/ On earth, to be high in heaven./ And see far off below you, where the gulf is fixed,/ Your persecutors in timeless torment/ Parched passion, beyond expiation" (Eliot, *Murder* 39). This description forces Thomas to see that martyring himself not only as a method of ensuring his own glory, but also as a guarantee of seeing his enemies persecuted in Hell is the "right deed for the wrong reason" (Eliot, *Murder* 44). It is the false humility railed against by Friedrich Nietzsche in *Genealogy of Morality* as he quotes Thomas Aquinas: "The blessed in the heavenly kingdom will see the torment of the damned so that they may even more thoroughly enjoy their blessedness" (Nietzsche 29).

This Fourth Tempter accuses Thomas of considering martyrdom for his own glory and to ensure his victory over his enemies. It is an inversion of Christ's third temptation in the desert. Jesus was offered the wrong deed for the right reason—worship Satan to help the world see the glory of God; Thomas was offered the right deed—to make himself low in accordance with Christ's teaching in the beatitudes—for the wrong

reason—in order to see himself raised up and his enemies suffer. Perhaps Eliot proposes this inversion as St. Peter's inverted crucifixion, in order not to suggest Thomas as a direct metaphor for Christ while preserving the *figura,*[40] as Spanos suggests. Certainly seeing his enemies suffer and his own veneration is the wrong motivation for allowing himself to be murdered. Because he has known this desire, he cries out, "Is there no way, in my soul's sickness,/ Does not lead to damnation in pride?/…Can I neither act nor suffer without perdition?" (Eliot, *Murder* 40). This cry alludes to another place in Mark's gospel in which, just before his death, Jesus cries, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). The Chorus echoes his desperation and unwittingly suggests to Thomas the answer to his suffering: "God gave us always some reason, some hope" (Eliot, *Murder* 43). And after an existential tour of his earthly action and suffering, Thomas finally replies, "I shall no longer act or suffer, to the sword's end" (Eliot, *Murder* 46). He will subject his own will—his own action and suffering—to God for the only "right reason": because God's will is the only reason and the only hope. Because God has willed it is the only "right reason" (Fergusson 31).

Imitatio Christi

The divine precedent for the saintly submission of will to God can be found, like the temptation in the desert, in all the gospels but John's. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus makes his famous plea for God to "take this cup away" from Him, but concedes that "Your will, not mine" be done. Thomas's decision not "to act or suffer, to the

[40] Spanos explains the *figura*, leaning on Auerbach, like this: "two persons or events of different times, the sacrifice of Isaac and the sacrifice of Christ, for example, are related in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encloses or fulfills the first; yet both point to a third, no less real, image in the future which will be the ultimate fulfillment of the first two events" (55).

sword's end" indicates his submission to the will of God even though it will mean death. The metaphor of "action and suffering," which peppers the text of the play, is best explained by Louis Martz. "The desire for this still point where all desires end (or "peace" as Becket calls it in his sermon) … is a moment of timeless reality, apprehended in the world of time" (Martz, "T.S. Eliot" 18). It is a moment of the eternal grace of God, perceived by a human. In perfectly submitting his will to God's, Becket defeats both action and suffering, dwelling in the eternal moment of God's grace. The trials a human undergoes in his or her conversion from human to saint is called the "perfection" of the saint. Martyrdom often fulfills this perfection. In Eliot's play, the perfection comes at the end of Part I, the spiritual climax of the play. Splitting the spiritual climax in Part I and the climax of the action in Part II (the actual murder) allows Elliot to maintain tension throughout the play.

Dramatizing the temptations and the perfection of Becket's will are not the only ways in which Eliot shows the likeness of Christ in Thomas. In 1889, James Stalker wrote *Imago Christi: The Example of Christ*, partially in response to the popularity of saints' lives such as William John Knox-Little's *St. Francis of Assisi: his times, life and work; lectures delivered in substance in the Ladye chapel of Worcester cathedral in the Lent of 1896*. The book is a devotional and commentary on the 1418 book by Thomas á Kempis called *Imitatio Christi*, which sought to "instruct the soul in Christian perfection with Christ as the Divine model" (Imitation of Christ). For Kempis, one of Christ's greatest directives was, "'Son,' says Christ to us, 'leave thyself and thou shalt find Me'" (Stalker 24). He considered St. Francis of Assisi a primary example of one who perfected his soul in union with the Peace of Christ. Stalker's 1889 book seeks to redirect modern

readers from Kempis' emphasis on the isolation of the desert saint to an emphasis on uniting one's human will with Christ's, in submission to God. The connection of God's will with "peace" and the central point that "Our vocation is to make God's will be done in all departments of [God's World]" (Stalker 25) seem to echo in *Murder in the Cathedral*. When the Messenger of Part I announces Thomas's arrival in Canterbury, exhorting the priests and women to "prepare to meet him," the Third Priest replies, "What peace can be found between the hammer and the anvil?" (Eliot, *Murder* 15). This small use of the word foreshadows the "peace" that is to be found in the perfection and death of Becket. Again, the First Priest asks, "Is it war or peace?" and the Messenger answers, "Peace, but not the kiss of peace," indicating that Thomas brings peace, but peace that has yet to be consummated (Eliot, *Murder* 16). And then, the first word uttered by Thomas in the play is, "Peace" (Eliot, *Murder* 21). Martz illustrates that this peace is the eternal divine peace at the point of the wheel—the point that is forever still as the wheel turns (Martz, "T.S. Eliot" 18-20). It is the absence of suffering and action that humans experience in the separation of their wills from God's.

Because Kempis' *Imitatio Christi* has been widely read throughout Christendom since the fifteenth century (Miola 285), and given Eliot's specialty in medieval texts, it is likely that both Kempis and Stalker influenced him. Saint Francis of Assisi's imitation of Christ's sacrifice through austerities also proved a popular subject in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with three major works on his life appearing in English between 1884 and 1923, including one by Paul Sabatier and another by G.K. Chesterton.

These influences suggest Eliot's incorporation of the *imitatio Christi*[41] in *Murder in the Cathedral* as evidenced by Thomas's perfection through the submission of his own will to God's.

If Stalker contemporized Kempis in his *Imago Christi* by suggesting that the submission of one's will to that of the divine is the ultimate imitation of Christ, Eliot goes further, bringing Thomas's *imitatio Christi* to life as the Paschal sacrifice in a play arranged as a Catholic mass—with Thomas's sacrifice standing in for Christ's in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. As Robert Ayers points out, "By 1928 Eliot had come to feel that 'the consummation of the drama, the perfect and ideal drama, is to be found in the ceremony of the Mass.' By 1935 that feeling had assumed such a shaping power that the Mass and the general Christian liturgy appear to have determined the very form of *Murder in the Cathedral*" (Ayers 579). Even a rudimentary knowledge of the arrangement of the Mass makes its use as the basis for the structure of the play unquestionable. As Ayers agrees, the placement of the "Interlude" or Christmas morning sermon, as the prose break in the verse of the two main parts, provides a clear hint that the main parts represent the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist that make up the Catholic Mass. While Ayers finds small connections between distinct parts of each of these liturgies present in the text of the play, like Eliot's incorporation of Greek dramatic element, finding an exhaustive allegory is not convincing or necessary. The *Agon*, or verbal sparing of the Tempters and Thomas in Part I prepare Thomas and the Chorus for the action of Part II in which Thomas's death at the hands of the Knights stands in for the sacrifice of Christ in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Because the

[41] I use the term "*imitatio Christi*" here as a general term meaning "in the imitation or image of Christ."

temptation of Christ in the desert might imply the gospel reading in the Liturgy of the Word, Eliot's use of this concept in Part I confirms the association.[42] The Liturgy of the Eucharist, which follows the sermon, begins with a procession called the offering of gifts in which the bread and wine for consecration are brought to the sanctuary, correlating well with the acts of Part II in which the Priests urge Thomas into the sanctuary of the Cathedral. Through the Eucharistic Prayer, both the celebration of the Last Supper and the death and resurrection of Christ's body are enacted in the Mass. In Eliot's play, Thomas's body stands in for Christ's as he is killed, and sharing in the peace of his union with God, recognized by the Third Priest's announcement of "another Saint in Canterbury," the Chorus resurrects from its fear a hope in a future where "from such ground springs that which forever renews the earth" (Eliot, *Murder* 86). If this is not enough, the final chorus is recited simultaneously with the sung prayer *Te Deum.* While Wormald complains of the commuting of this prayer from the Matins ceremony with which it is ordinarily associated to the Vespers ceremony being conducted at the time of Becket's death (Davidson, "T.S. Eliot" 135), according to Catholic use, the *Te Deum* "is occasionally sung in thanksgiving to God for some special blessing (e.g. the election of a pope, the consecration of a bishop, *the canonization of a saint*, the profession of a religious, the publication of a treaty of peace, a royal coronation, etc.), and then usually *after Mass*" (Henry para. 8).[43] Although it is clear that Eliot intended the play to have internalized the structure of the Mass, as Wormald and Davidson explain, the ceremony is generally, not specifically employed.

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[42] The Liturgy of the Word includes a procession, prayers, and readings from the old and new testaments, followed by a reading from one of the four gospels.
[43] My emphasis.

By bringing together pairs of disparate elements, Eliot's play mimics the tension of what he portrays as the suffering of the world, so torn between the will for the worldly and the will of God. He includes eyewitness accounts and fiction, elements of classical Greek drama and medieval British drama, vernacular religious drama and ritualistic liturgical drama. Illustrating this tension, he has not only complied with the compulsion of his "historical sense," but he has produced a prototype of his dramatic development: nearly twenty years later, he would explain to Lord Samuel that he begins his plays with the mere "situations" of Greek drama, but develops them according to the "workings of [his] own mind" (Tanner 124). He begins with the mere "situation" of Thomas Becket and develops it into a story according to the workings of his own mind. In his modern saint's play, he portrays martyrdom with elements of both the classical and Christian hero. And to this he adds characteristics of his own conception of heroism. While Shaw's heroine overlooks human convention in obedience to her God to the point of heresy, Eliot's saint is bound by his humanity to the point of desperation—the tension of the entire plot is bound up with the challenge of accepting God's will over man's. Joan never even recognizes the fact or the consequences of her heresy (following the direction of her voices) until she has lost her trial and briefly recants in order to save her own life. Her final surrender is not driven by a compulsion to conform to God's will, but to avoid imprisonment. Conversely, Eliot's saint fully experiences the desperation of the human condition: his choice is the choice of every human, back to Adam and Eve: he must decide between the ways of secular politics and the ways of God, between the glory of martyrdom and surrendering to God's will. He must not choose to be martyred to win the battle with Henry; rather, he must choose to relinquish his pride, his friendship, and his

battle with Henry, in order to take the mantle of Christ upon himself in the *imitatio Christi*, denying his will for the Father's. And the human suffering of the saint is as important for Eliot's hero as it is for his Christian understanding of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

The comparison of Thomas and Jesus has been sustained throughout the play as Thomas has both "known and not known" what it is to "act" and "suffer" (Eliot, *Murder* 40). While the suffering of the human condition is great, the devastation of Christ as he suffered separation from the Being with whom he shared a Spirit through all eternity in his death on the cross and descent into Hell[44] must be unknown to any mere human. And yet if Christ were not fully human, his death would not constitute the sacrifice required to redeem humanity from its own sins. Thomas explains in the Christmas morning sermon of the Interlude, "Just as we rejoice and mourn at once, in the Birth and in the Passion of Our Lord; so also, in a smaller figure, we both rejoice and mourn in the death of martyrs" (Eliot, *Murder* 49). For Thomas, as for Jesus, the torment of humanness is felt most heavily in the temptation that precedes the Passion. Because humans suffer through separation from God in sin, Thomas's suffering ends when he submits his will to God's at the end of Part I, saying, "I shall no longer act or suffer, to the sword's end./ Now my

[44] The words of the Nicene Creed, regularly used in the Catholic and Anglican liturgies, confirm that Jesus Christ is "one in being with the Father," and that he "suffered and was buried." The Apostle's Creed, used less often in the liturgies but still a significant profession of faith in both churches, affirms that he "descended to the dead," or, in some translations, "descended into Hell," before rising again on the third day (Easter). This "suffering" is often interpreted as the dreadful separation from the Father that constitutes the true sacrifice of the Passion; its end, the reunion with the Father on the third day, is celebrated as Easter. This death and descent are significant components of Christ's full humanity.

good Angel, whom God appoints/ To be my guardian, hover over the swords' points" (Eliot, *Murder* 46).

The *figura* of Thomas as a martyr coupled with Christ as the savior adds one more degree of tension to Eliot's play of opposing elements in *Murder in the Cathedral*. And though the protagonist's spiritual epiphany comes at the end of Part I, the ongoing struggle of the modern human condition, caught in an existential bifurcation of church and state, continues through Part II as the Chorus and the audience itself is tempted by the speeches of the Knights. "With and through the chorus, we the audience are invited to participate in the celebration of the act of martyrdom and to accept the sacrifice of Thomas as made in our behalf. Before we can do this, however, we, like Thomas, must undergo temptation to deny the efficacy of his sacrifice and its relevance to us" (Jones, "Temptation" 96). David E. Jones would have the audience deciding whether Thomas's death represents a true martyrdom or merely the logical end of a political agitator. However, the farcical nature of the Knight's speeches with their feeble attempts at secularist argument must, at the very least, be taken with a grain of salt here. The fact that the First Knight at once declares himself as "a man of action and not of words" (Eliot, *Murder* 78) seems to reduce his honor materially, "action" having been shown throughout the play to be synonymous with suffering. And while the Third Knight likewise presents a thin argument, claiming that, if nothing else, the Knights are "disinterested" parties to the murder that they clearly hope will strengthen the seat that pays them, there is a weightier issue introduced by the Second Knight. He claims he wants what Eliot might be said to want, a union of church and state.

Union of Church and State

In "Religious Drama: Medieval and Modern," Eliot describes his discomfort with the isolation of liberalism from religiosity very plainly.

> What I am proposing is not merely that we need to go to a religious play or to a secular play in much the same spirit. It is an opposition to the compartmentalization of life in general, to the sharp division between our religious and ordinary life…we have to adapt ourselves, every day, to the compromise of liberalism: to living among and to maintaining common sympathy and common action (as indeed is duty as well as necessity) with, people who deny or ignore the fundamentals of Christianity…to abandon the task of evangelisation would be abnegation of an essential duty….We need to strive towards a kind of reintegration of both kinds of drama, just as we need to strive towards a reintegration of life. (Eliot, "Religious Drama" 10)

Nostalgia for a medieval past, which he shared with Pound and Ford, included a desire to see a union of Church and State, looking back "toward a medievalism that joined faith and culture in one elaborate mosaic" (Stevens para. 14). Eliot's frequent commentaries in *The Criterion* between 1922 and 1939 reveal his aspiration to effect "a unity of spiritual and socio-political forces toward one end: the 'good life,' in the medieval sense of simplicity, unanimity of soul and spirit, and oneness of intellectual purpose" (Stevens para. 11). While these aspirations may arise from an idealized impression of the Middle Ages, his hopes prove no more unrealistic than the polarized ideologies tearing apart Europe in the 1930s and 40s.

This concept of integration is reflected in the Second Knight's speech, though he notes that religion should be an aspect of the State, and thereby subordinate to the central government—a situation Eliot saw evidenced in socialist France. He says, "Had Becket concurred with the King's wishes, we should have had an almost ideal State: a union of spiritual and temporal administration, under the central government" (Eliot, *Murder* 81). The Knight condemns Thomas because "he affirmed immediately that there was a higher

order than that which our King, and he as the King's servant, had for so man years striven to establish." The Second Knight calls for "the just subordination of the pretentions of the Church to the welfare of the State" (Eliot, *Murder* 81). The difference between Eliot's concept of integration and the Knight's lies in the "subordination" of the Church to the State. Though the action of the play omits Henry, the speeches by the Knights recall him and remind the audience that Thomas has been martyred because he failed to subordinate the decisions and property of the Church to the king's will. This dichotomy underlies the tension of the play, and remains a significant issue in the lives of all the play's audiences, even today. Just as Hamlet had to decide before him, Thomas must choose to be of the world of action and suffering, or not to be—the other choice for him being to allow God to act through him on behalf of the Church. And though the Fourth Knight would name Thomas's choice "Suicide," a mortal sin, the Christian interpretation would have it "martyrdom."

Whether or not the audience is truly "tempted" to disregard Thomas's sacrifice as Jones suggests, the drama provides a resolution to the tension of its diverse parts, sources, and temptations in the final song of the Chorus. They sing:

> For wherever a saint has dwelt, wherever a martyr has given his blood for the blood of Christ,
> There is holy ground, and the sanctity shall not depart from it…
> From such ground springs that which forever renews the earth
> Though it is forever denied. Therefore, O God, we thank Thee
> Who hast given such blessing to Canterbury. (Eliot, *Murder* 87)

It is significant that the Chorus has realized the sacred nature of almost any ground, "though it is forever denied," and they have found hope in the recognition. They note that the sanctity of the ground does not change despite the eventualities of time. It provides a sacred base for the suffering and actions that would move on it. While the stories of Hamlet and Orestes are tragic partially because neither choice, to act or not to act, will bring them peace or spiritual satisfaction, Thomas's choice results in the glory of an enlarged communion of saints and a renewed hope for the audience—hope for peace in the tumult of the opposing factions of this world. In a way, Thomas is the only character in the entire play, like an Everyman wandering in a wasteland of knights, priests, tempters, and choruses. He stands in for each member of the audience, in isolation. The drama enacts a kind of theurgy that would harmonize the cacophony of temptations facing every human, suggesting that eternal peace dwells just beneath each of us on the sacred ground of submission to the supreme rule of God. For Eliot, the eternal moment attained in the ultimate submission to God in martyrdom is reflected by degrees in a harmony of united religion and politics.

The Right Reasons

Both Shaw and Eliot depict their medieval saints for similar "right reasons": a more perfect future for humanity. However, their paths take opposite methods and ideologies. Shaw valorizes an heretical Joan, whose faith led her against the Church of her day, in support of criticizing religious institutions whose doctrine does not lie at the logical end of freethinking. His play declares that logic and the mind of man should supersede faith in traditional doctrine and lead humanity to a progressively more perfect future. This is the lesson of the real Saint Joan, as opposed to the mythologized virginal

victim of political machinations. This is Joan the suffragette, whose creative thought blazes past social mores, whether they are dictated by governments or the Church. This blazing past legal pressures in support of a truth that lies beyond comprises the Jamesian concept of universal saintliness espoused in the twentieth century, allowing Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. to be admitted to lists of "saints."

Eliot's Thomas posses the same ability to see past the secular arguments of his day to the truth beyond Henry II's coercive Knights. And yet Eliot does not draw Thomas as a superman, endowed with natural abilities beyond that of his fellow humans. Rather, Eliot removes the specific political framework that sets him apart from others—we don't see him as Chancellor or Archdeacon in cahoots with the King as Anouilh would show him nearly a decade later. While he constitutes the undeniable center of the play, his worldly prestige never manifests, suggesting that there is something more authentic at the center of his being than the entrapments of his person.

Leaving the saint unfettered by material distractions simplifies the plot of *Murder in the Cathedral*, but does not lead inevitably to the popular sort of simple-mindedness of turn of the century hagiography. "Reducing medieval saintliness to childlike simplicity and sincerity, hagiographers diminished the challenge to secular modes of thought and feeling offered by the saints" (Lears 152). A simple sincerity and "childlike naiveté" born of narrower and clearer choices made saints a popular foil to the complexities of modern thought and contemporary society. Yet Eliot's Thomas does not face a simple choice, and he does not start the play in the decisive state he reveals in the Interlude. Rather, the motivation of the play's action is "to show the evolution of Becket's state of mind to that of the Christmas sermon" (Browne 42), which is effected by his conflict with the Fourth

Tempter. Eliot's notes in the Houghton Library emphasize the real struggle Thomas faces when they reveal that the original end of Part I read: "never conquest, only unending battle" (Browne 44). Only through the anguish of recognizing his own weakness can Thomas surmount the temptation to martyrdom for his own glory and to see his enemies suffer. While the first three Tempters provide the simple single-mindedness and childlike sincerity Lears describes, the encounter with the Fourth Tempter challenges Thomas in a way that strengthens his reliance on God for victory over worldly distraction. Recognizing his sin and being redeemed by the perfecting power of submission to God provides the turn toward hope in Part II that differentiates Eliot's modern saint's play from Greek tragedy. Rather than being consumed by fate made tragic by status and hubris, Thomas's last act "to perfect [his] will" is accomplished in martyrdom.

Providing a pared-down version of Becket's story allows Eliot to focus on the authentic heart of human struggle to "do the right thing" for the right reasons.

> The name of Thomas of Canterbury still has power over the hearts of men. This is not only because the controversy about his motives still fascinates them, but because the centuries of devotion have left a legacy, a residue of conviction that the values for which he gave his life are in essence permanent, and therefore relevant to our time as to his own." (Browne 36)

Eliot himself noted, "that the basic conflict of the twentieth century came very near to repeating that of the twelfth" (Browne 36). His conviction came through in the writing and performance of the play as one of his critics wrote, "the thing was direct and terribly real, the poetry of the choruses was simple and immediate in its meaning as our own daily lives" (Browne 64). Further confirmation of the play's resemblance to the everyday conflicts people face was provided by *The Times* journalist Dermot Morrah who wrote in a review of the play that it "is not confined by the temporal accidents of its setting," that

the Chorus "links in the Greek manner the high ritual of the action with common life" (Browne 66-67). The difference between Thomas the saint and Thomas the man lies in his admission of sin, and his choice to "do the right thing." The fact that his name is the common "Thomas" in the play, rather than the distinguishing "Becket" further ties the character not only to this saintly designation, but to the common man, and to Thomas Stearns Eliot himself. It echoes the existentialism of "The Wasteland," paring down the character to his essence, outside of his temporal distinctions, and grapples with the ultimate choices all humans must make.

Neither *Murder in the Cathedral* nor *Saint Joan* overtly adopts a modernist aspect. Shaw didn't attempt to redefine the space of the theater, and Eliot did not attempt to use special language to point to the construction of his narrative. But they both redefine the purpose of saints' plays from the pageantry and the valorizing celebrations of the Middle Ages. They expose a version of their saint, authenticated by the study of historical transcripts, who is able to see beyond temporal concerns to a greater truth, despite the suffering it causes. While Shaw suggests a world in which people are not beholden to an inevitably oppressive religious institution, Eliot suggests a world in which people are able to move beyond the comfortable path to a nobler one. Both plays provide a victory over oppressive politics, so rampant in their day, whether it was hope for the nascent socialism of the 1920s or escape from binary political ideologies of the 1930s. In this way, these plays "do something." Perhaps the greatest difference between the modernism of these dramas and Gertrude Stein's *Four Saints in Three Acts* lies here: Stein's play doesn't seek to "do" anything. *Four Saints in Three Acts*, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, employs a clearer modernism in language and form that

seeks simply to convey Stein's authentic perception of saints, demythologizing them by lifting them from their historical narrative to a greater extent than Eliot did with Thomas Becket. Stein depicts the saints she encountered in Avila and Spain as she saw them, as works of art. With her erratic formalism she points to the construction of her own piece in order to emphasize the construction of saints in myth and ritual. In so doing, she suggests that the saints' authentic essence lies in the statues, paintings, poems, and narratives we experience in the present, not in a removed heaven or medieval past.

CHAPTER V

STEIN, SAINTS, AND STATUES

"There are, of course, those who seek a key to some more perfect understanding of Miss Stein's text, just as there are those who wish to find representation in an abstract Picasso painting. It is unfortunate, perhaps, that I can have very little to say to these people. It becomes more and more evident to me that if appreciation of the text of Miss Stein is not instinctive with a person he never acquires it." (Carl Van Vechten, 1934)

To say that Stein's libretto for Virgil Thomson's 1934 opera, *Four Saints in Three Acts,* is different from any other saints' play written in the twentieth century, or any other century for that matter, is an understatement. To say it is unlike any of her other operas and plays, however, may be exaggeration, as it employs the repetition and non-narrative characteristic of much of her work. While she did write another opera about saints, titled *Saints and Singing*, *Four Saints in Three Acts* is her only libretto to include specifically named saints and biographical material about those saints. The main characters, Therese of Avila and Ignatius Loyola, were both sixteenth-century saints devoted to the counter-Reformation, who developed new orders, re-initiating austerities and spiritual exercises in contrast to the luxuries of Rome and the secular clergy. While Therese and Ignatius figure prominently in the script, to claim the script tells the story of their human lives may be granting too much narrative quality to the opera. Rather it depicts saints in the form we have come to know in modern times: as works of art peopling a landscape in stained glass windows, porcelain figurines, carved statues, and decorative medals whose meanings derive from legends and tradition. Stein portrays these saints as a cubist artist

would, assembling many perspectives in short "tableaux" (Durham 50), or static scenes in which nothing happens but phrases evoke a presence. These static moments in the libretto act as trees in a landscape—they are simply there. By amassing these impressions, Stein provides the audience with their own experience of saints through bits of biography, metaphorical images, and a joyous congregation in heaven. Stein contends that these bits, images, and legendary impressions constitute the "essence" of saints.

The static nature of the script is difficult to imagine without having read the libretto. One of the shortest regions of the script that makes up a complete "tableau" comes at the beginning of Act One.

> Saint Theresa in a storm at Avila there can be rain and warm snow and warm that is the water is warm the river is not warm the sun is not warm and if to stay to cry. If to stay to if to stay if having to stay to if having to stay if to cry to stay if to cry stay to cry to stay. (Stein, *Four Saints* 21)

The cohesive vocabulary and repeated phrases mark the lines as a single unit of text. This phrasing is not found anywhere else in the libretto. If this were a cubist landscape painting, it would make up one region of the canvas, depicting a particular perspective, surrounded by other portions of canvas showing different perspectives. Other regions of the libretto contain cohesive units of text that, rather than conveying narrative, capture a single, static concept or impression.

When asked about whether or not her audience could understand her libretto on NBC radio in 1934, Stein insisted "Of course they understand it or they would not listen to it. You mean by understand that they can talk about it in the way that you have the habit of talking, putting it in other words, but I mean by understanding enjoyment. If you enjoy it, you understand it" (MMA). The enjoyment of the audience should be in experiencing the saints, not in literally understanding a narrative. In conveying her

experience of the "essential" nature (B. Ryan 81) of saints, Stein presents several "tableaux," or static impressions of saintliness (Durham 50). Foreshadowing Eliot's conception of saints relinquishing their own wills for God's will, which stands eternally still at the center of the wheel of time (Martz, "T.S. Eliot" 18), Stein claims that the essence of a saint is static—it does "nothing" (Hoffman 81). "A saint a real saint never does anything, a martyr does something, but a really good saint does nothing, and so I wanted to have Four Saints who did nothing and I wrote the *Four Saints in Three Acts* and they did nothing and that was everything" (Hoffman 81). This notion of saints doing nothing indicates that a "good" saint simply has to be him or herself, without performing any task, such as martyrdom, to attain sainthood. Besides having lived a saintly life, the saints Stein depicts now reside in heaven, while mythologized remnants of their human lives remain as artifacts on Earth, populating catholic countries, like Spain, in paintings, stained glass, statuary, and medals.

Artists as Saints

Stein herself wrote and lectured a good deal on *Four Saints in Three Acts*, especially in her *Lectures in America* in 1934 after the success of the opera and *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Because so much of her writing is confusing, even when she answers direct questions, Stein's lectures on the opera both reveal and obscure her intentions. She clearly reveals that the play is intended to convey a "landscape" especially inspired by the city of Avila and Saints Therese and Ignatius Loyola ("Plays" LI). What she means by an opera being a landscape is less clear. Stein uses the term "landscape" to associate herself with landscape artists of the Spanish and southern French countryside like Cezanne, whose work numbered prominently in the collections of the

Stein family. Virgil Thomson, who composed the music and led the original production effort, explains that in the lives of saints, he and Stein saw "a parallel to the life [they] were leading, in which consecrated artists were practicing their art…needing to learn the terrible disciplines of truth and spontaneity, of challenging their skills without loss of inspiration" (Holbrook & Dilworth 10). This similarity between saints lives and artists lives provided Stein less with an allegorical reading of saints as artists as it allowed her to see herself as a saint. As Shaw's superwoman had convictions that went beyond popular convention, Stein understood cubists[45] as able to see the world in a manner different from common sight. They could see the world laid flat (Stein, *Geographical History* 139). As a cubist in the medium of words, Stein produced a landscape of saints whose singular devotion to reforming the church matched the ardor of Picasso, Thomson, and herself in employing new methods of revealing the world in painting, music, and language.

Stein's conception of saintliness acknowledges that the essences of saints exist in the mythologies and artwork that carry them into future centuries. Her libretto characterizes saints as she experienced them in the legends, paintings, figurines, carvings, stained-glass windows, and rituals of Spain. The many tableaux, depicting various perspectives of these saints, provide a window into what she calls their "essence" (B. Ryan 81). When one speaks of saints, there is always a temporal problem in the fact that they are not canonized until after they die, though the famous actions associated with

[45] The idea that Stein practices a literary "cubism" appears often in criticism of her work. The fragmented quality of her prose as well as her "discovery" and close friendship with Picasso is taken as evidence of this. A few references to the common association can be found in Hobhouse (142), Hoffman (82), and Ryan (17).

their stories largely take place during their human lives.[46] Plays about saints might be about their lives, as Shaw and Eliot's plays, or they might depict a glorified saint after death. Many early medieval dramas were devoted to the posthumous miracles of Saint Nicholas,[47] often appearing on Earth to defend Christians or convert heathens. Stein depicts saints as living permanently in the Spanish landscape, conveying bits and portions of their lives to all who encounter them. They are prolific, like "pigeons on the grass" (Stein, *Four Saints* 46). They convey history only through symbolism and fragmented stories, existing in the current day, simultaneously in heaven and in pictures and statues, on museum walls, church windows, cathedral facades.

Stein goes to great lengths to prevent her opera from presenting a purely "historical" narrative of past lives (Stein, *Geographical History* 139). Her drama "is the presentation of a state of existing as opposed to a story or character sketch" (Webb 448). The absence of the expected narrative in the opera challenges audiences to enjoy the presentation of saintly existence rather than simply the lives of the saints portrayed. This existence is static, like a landscape perceived and portrayed by a painter, a particular moment (or series of moments), frozen and captured by the artist. At times the saints are depicted as pigeons on the grass, at others they are like magpies surrounded by sky, and at others they are the consecrated Eucharist at a Mass. In *Four Saints in Three Acts*,

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[46] Many saints are canonized pursuant to acts that occurred during their lives, but many are canonized pursuant to miracles documented to have occurred after their deaths. For instance, two miracles have been attributed to Pope John Paul II in the effort to have him canonized, both resulting in miraculous healing after prayers for intercession were made to him. Plays surrounding the posthumous miracles of Saint Nicholas were quite popular in medieval France.

[47] For instance, four of the six medieval Latin manuscripts of the Fleury Playbook are miracle plays depicting legends of the posthumous Saint Nicholas.

Stein conveys her own apprehension of Saint Therese of Avila, Saint Ignatius Loyola, and other saints' cultural existence in Spain just before the First World War.

Cubism

The image of saints either as statues or as so many pigeons sitting on the grass conveys Stein's notion of saints "doing nothing." Stein wrote once that, "Generally speaking, anyone is more interesting doing nothing than doing anything" (Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* 112). Stein saw herself as doing nothing much of the time, and so found a similarity between herself and saints. "This [doing nothing] is not very different from Gertrude's own way of working and her justification of simply being: 'It takes a lot of time to be a genius, you have to sit around so much doing nothing'" (Stein in Hobhouse 142). For Stein genius is part of one's being, not something that results from actions. A genius cannot act in a way that makes them not a genius. Her "interest in saints should not surprise us because, for her, a saint was the truly fulfilled person who had to do nothing at all. He or she only had to be. In that sense the saint is like Stein's conception of a landscape; it is the essence of a particular time and place" (Hoffman 80).

If doing nothing provides Stein with a link between herself and saints, so does being a cubist. An important aspect of Steinian sainthood is their "genius" in seeing the essence of the world, as she also believed cubist artists can. The genius of saints, cubists, and herself includes an ability to see and express reality.

> That summer in Avila she had worked on the last part of *Tender Buttons*, having been struck by 'a desire to express the rhythm of the visible world.' That work was for her a real achievement of an expression of 'outer reality,' the result of a new way of seeing. Saints were also seers in this way. Their vision, like hers, and, as she said, like the mystic vision of Juan Gris, penetrated through the preconceived reality of the rest of the world to the true reality of things. Saints were therefore interesting because they were like Cubists. And like Cubists (for

> Gertrude only Spaniards were Cubists), the Saints she chose were Spanish: Therese, Ignatius and Chavez. (Hobhouse 142)

Stein's conception of cubists echoes Shaw's superman who is able to see beyond religious and cultural norms to the truth that lies beyond. If Stein's saints are like cubists because they see God's truth, then Stein is like a saint because she sees and is able to convey their essence. Many critics recognized Stein's work as being similar to cubists'. The owners of the theater in which the opera first played also saw a connection between her libretto and cubism, thus "it was not by accident surely that led the directors of the Wadsworth Atheneum, in which the Avery Memorial Theater is situated, to give a Picasso show simultaneously with the production of the opera" (Vechten 9).

But Stein is not like a cubist only because she sees the essence of her subject, she is like a cubist because she uses her art to express the "outer reality" from different perspectives simultaneously, flattening out time, as a cubist lays out portions of different perspectives. Stein wrote her libretto in a style that made it "flat," like a cubist masterpiece: "the human mind has neither identity nor time and when it sees anything has to look flat. That is what makes the masterpiece what it is" (Stein, *Geographical History* 139). In order to constitute a cubist landscape, Stein's saints had to be portrayed as elements in relation through space rather than characters in development through time" (Holbrook & Dilworth 11). So she wrote scenes that are "snapshots of existence rather than traditional scenes of action" (Webb 449).

Stein's ability to capture the essence of the saints in her snapshots allows her audience to have an encounter with saints rather than hear about their history. In her writing of the early twentieth century, Stein attempted to capture exact replicas of her perceptions—to convey the "now" of her moment of apprehension. Because of this effort

to portray static moments, her drama eschewed the Western literary tradition based on "Aristotelian concepts of progressive time, causality and single point perspective" (B. Ryan 15). In order to present multiple static perceptions at once, as Picasso did in groundbreaking pieces like "Les Damoiselles d'Avignon," Stein wrote "tableaux" instead of progressive scenes—she wrote nonprogressive moments of speech that provide different perspectives of the saint or saints which, all together, would capture her apprehension of them accurately. Stein admits that "The only thing that I never get tired of doing is looking at pictures" (B. Ryan 34), and that "a thing without progress is a thing more splendid than a thing which progresses" (Webb 449). For these reasons, she conceived of a static dramaturgy "that joins with those of Brecht and Artaud in evoking the definitive qualities of the contemporary avant-garde theater" but which is "more tied to the world of painting than to theater" (B. Ryan xiii). Stein's special ability to see from multiple perspectives at once makes her like a saint herself, experiencing static moments like Eliot's eternal point in the wheel of time.

Besides depicting individual static moments in her libretto, Stein presents multiple perspectives of those moments by writing many permutations of a single phrase. For instance, in the fifth "Scene One," after the first beginning of Act III, she writes,

> He asked for a distant magpie as if they made a difference.
> He asked for a distant magpie as if he asked for a distant magpie as if that made a difference.
> He asked as if that made a difference.
> He asked for a distant magpie.
> As if that made a difference he asked for a distant magpie as if that made a difference. He asked as if that made a difference. A distant magpie. He asked for a distant magpie. He asked for a distant magpie. (Stein, *Four Saints* 48)

In this passage, no speaker is denoted (this is true of much of the libretto), there is no recognizable antecedent for "he" or "they," and there is no interlocutor of whom the

speaker "asks" for a distant magpie. Because this region of the libretto is devoted to Saint Ignatius, and because Ignatius has the previous two lines, the "he" here likely concerns Ignatius, but there is no rule that "he" must mean the same person each time it is sung. In a production of the opera, these lines would be sung by several different unnamed saints, some sentences sung solo and others by multiple saints together. The effect is that each of the iterations provides a different perspective of the same "asking for a distant magpie" (Stein, *Four Saints* 48).

One perspective of asking for a distant magpie belongs to St. Ignatius. His long-term "pie in the sky" goal of settling in the Holy Land was denied once by the Franciscans and later by the Pope (Pollen); settling in the Holy Land was his "pie in the sky," a permutation of "a distant magpie." He also encountered ecstatic visions of the Virgin Mary, whose depiction in blue and white habit resembles the blue wings and white breast of the magpie. Whether either of these interpretations were intended by Stein, each iteration of the request for a "distant magpie" carries with it new possibilities for interpretation without any indication of temporal progression, the way that Juan Gris' 1918 painting "The Guitar" suggests sheets of music and parts of a guitar from many different perspectives at once.

While the repetition in the image of the guitar or the lines in Stein's opera suggest new methods of representation, an operagoer would most likely not find the repetition in this libretto particularly anomalous. Most operas include repetition of lines in crescendo, increasing the suspense and emotion in each scene, often in a foreign language that forces the audience to apprehend the general wholeness of a scene rather than understanding each verse. Employing a method that supplies many different iterations of each static

scene permits Stein to bring her version of the "wholeness" of saints to the stage (and the page) (B. Ryan 16).

Collaboration

The opera that resulted from Stein's collaboration with composer Virgil Thomson (and later Maurice Grosser and Florine Stettheimer) became the longest running opera in Broadway history after opening at the Avery Memorial Theater, in the basement of the Wadsworth Atheneum, Feb. 7, 1934. It had a 70-performance run that delighted the New York avant garde. One could hear talk of "the Saints play" on the street (Hobhouse 173), and it caused quite a stir. Besides the somewhat impenetrable libretto, production decisions made *Four Saints* a sensation that led critics to compare Stein's "theatrical goals" to "the concept of spectacle, a non narrative flood of sights and sounds similar to a circus" (Web 448). Certainly Thomson (composer), Grosser[48] (scenario creator), and Stettheimer (set designer) took Stein's libretto into the realm of spectacle with their additions. The cast of black performers in a set of cellophane and white decorations based loosely on "the tinsel and glitter, the exuberance and informality of the naïve altar decorations characteristic of Latin countries" (Durham 49) dazzled nearly as much as the music and words themselves. One viewer wrote about the "unearthly beauty that the first curtain disclosed and which mounted and mounted as the thing went on and finally left all the hard-boiled and worldly connoisseurs in tears at the end" (Hobhouse 173).

While the opera is definitely a collaborative work, the style of the libretto itself is very Steinian. Like the cubist paintings of Picasso or the landscapes of Cezanne are recognizable, the libretto is hard not to recognize as Stein's creation. Her wordplay,

[48] Grosser created the stage concept, called the scenario, for Four Saints in Three Acts. He was largely known as a painter of landscapes and portraits.

repetition, and non-narrative form give the libretto her signature. While this helps readers discern what is Stein's from what belongs to Thomson and the others in the collaboration, it does not help the reader or listening audience make sense of its words. The history of the collaboration, along with knowledge of the saints' lives, Stein's *Lectures in America* and early experiences in Spain, as well as her ideas about cubism and identity all help a reader gain some ground in apprehending this landscape of saints with a deeper impression than a simple perusal allows. Although there is nothing didactic in the opera, Stein has created a work that conveys her own apprehension of saints as a persistent and artistic existence in Spain.

Early in 1927, Stein agreed to write the libretto of an opera for Thomson, after hearing his musical rendition of her poem "Susie Asado." What he wanted was something in the format of 'classic Italian opera' with some historical subject (Hobhouse 141):

> I thought Italian opera seria of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was exactly the sort of form one could do something with. And the general principles of that were a serious mythological subject with a tragic ending, in which the commerce of the play, so to speak, takes place in rapid recitative, and the emotional moments are formalized and concentrated into set pieces strung out along this recitative. I thought that was a healthy form one could do something with. (Holbrook & Dilworth 9)

The disrupted narrative form, painting word pictures in several "tableaux" (Webb 449), worked well both with these guidelines and with Stein's signature style.

With the format defined, Thomson and Stein had to agree on a subject. They shared the attitude that classical mythology had been "overdone." When Thomson recommended history and religion as sources of mythology, Stein initially suggested George Washington as the subject of the libretto, but Thomsom rejected this idea claiming, "he's the father of his country; it's a little hard to demythologize him"

(Holbrook & Dilworth 9). This quotation indicates the goal in their attempt "to do something" with the operatic form. They attempt to demythologize a mythologized subject—to shed light on the truth underlying legend. "In Stein's atelier, where they were talking, were many porcelain statuettes of saints placed about. Possibly inspired by these, they began to consider the lives of saints" (Holbrook & Dilworth 9).

When asked about their level of collaboration, Thomson replied that "She didn't work with me, and I didn't work with her. We agreed on what we were going to make it about and then she had to do her work and then I had to do mine. It was not a constant adjustment in terms of theatrical production, as libretto and opera writing often is" (B. Ryan 34). "I agreed to the landscape and subject…She turned out a Spanish landscape peopled with Spanish saints, with whom she had, so to speak, geographical contact" (Holbrook & Dilworth 10). While the landscape Stein "turned out" may have been "Spanish," the set does not correspond to any particular place in Spain. Rather, the impression of saints mimics Stein's consciousness of their existence as a part of Spanish culture. Her apprehension of saints began not just with reading their lives, but seeing porcelain figures in windows (Holbrook & Dilworth 10).

Stein was not interested in portraying the heroic narratives of saints' lives in her play.

> Indeed, she rejected Christianity as a fairytale and felt that the advantage of her own religion was that 'when a Jew dies he is dead.' But she was an avid reader of saints' lives, nonetheless, and had, a long time ago, been particularly moved by Avila and its saint, Therese, when she had gone with Alice to Spain in the summer of 1912. (Hobhouse 142)

The opera provided Stein with a space in which to portray the reality of saints whose existence she encountered in France and Spain. Her play expresses "what is central to

today's theatrical avant-garde: a concern, above all, with the formal aspects of theatre and art, and with the exploration of personal consciousness" (B. Ryan xiv).

Biographical References

In the late nineteenth-century, "Biographies of medieval saints and translations of their writings proliferated as never before. From Francis of Assisi to the humblest communicant at Chartres, the souls of the Middle Ages fascinated the American reading public" (Lears 142). However, it was not straightforward narratives that the New York theatergoers sought out: "People who felt overburdened by intellectuality and cut off from 'real life' did not want the scholastics' rational system, however elegantly constructed. Some wanted simple faith, others spontaneous feeling, others sacred mystery—anything, in other words, except logical order" (Lears 142). Stein and Thomson's opera eschewed logical order and embraced spontaneity. These may have been reasons for the popularity of the opera, though whether or not its mystery proved too thick for much of the audience is another story. In *Four Saints,* "there is no plot, no authorially indicated stage action beyond the most minimally oblique suggestions, no story, no resolution, no reversal, and no climax either situational or thematic. Once again, Stein's major device for conveying her sense of structural essence is the meandering voice of her own consciousness" (Hoffman 81). Illustrating her own consciousness, Stein depicted saints "as figures who by their simple existence were magical, and they would be figures in a landscape, itself, by simply existing, magical" (Hobhouse 143).

How successful Stein was in presenting a recognizable "simple existence" of saints is a matter of some contention; critics' impressions of the opera vary drastically. Their characterizations of the libretto's contents vary like the different perspectives in a

cubist painting. Most fall in one of two camps. There are those who claim the opera bears no relation to the lives of the saints it portrays:

- "Stein's miracle play…is no more about St. Therese than *Einstein on the Beach*, its descendant, is about Albert Einstein" (Marranca 43).
- "The text emphatically does not consider the lives of the saints" (Park 28).

And there are those who claim that Stein's saints narrate portions of their lives:

- "The story -- if you can call it that -- follows the saints as they recall their lives on earth and enjoy a heavenly lawn party" (Michaels).
- "Saint Therese enacts for the instruction of the saints and visitors scenes from her own saintly life" (Durham 50).

The most convincing opinion on this point eschews the binary, explaining that historical facts (whether they are contained in the opera or not) are "irrelevant to the libretto":

- "knowledge of the lives of the historical St. Térèse and St. Ignatius does not effectively supplement the audience's understanding of their namesakes in *Four Saints* because historical facts are irrelevant to the libretto and to the staging of the opera" (Webb 448).

Since Stein was more interested in creating an experience of saints than telling a history (which she believes everyone has heard over and over), it follows that any representation of the saints' lives would not be the focus of the opera. However, the first two acts, or regions of the libretto in which the first two acts are found,[49] do focus on biographical impressions from the lives of Therese and Ignatius, respectively. There is no definite

[49] The repetition of scene markers and act markers make the separation of specific acts and scenes impossible. For instance, Act One is followed by Act Two, but the next page contains another Act One marker.

boundary between the two acts, so the focus gradually changes when more references to Ignatius take over from references to Therese.

Act One begins with the short tableau about a storm at Avila:

> Saint Therese in a storm at Avila there can be rain and warm snow and warm that is the water is warm the river is not warm the sun is not warm and if to stay to cry. If to stay to if to stay if having to stay to if having to stay if to cry to stay if to cry stay to cry to stay. (Stein, *Four Saints* 21)

These lines, while not narrative, provide images related to the young life of Therese, whose mother died when she was only fourteen. She lived in Avila and decided early on to take religious orders though her father did not approve and refused to allow her to leave home. Leaving without his knowledge and against his will in order to enter the Carmelite Convent of the Incarnation caused her great emotional pain (Zimmerman). The conflict surrounding the pain both of staying with her family and of leaving her family are reflected in the words "in a storm at Avila" and "if to stay to cry." In her letters, St. Therese uses the metaphor of a "storm" for times in which she experiences emotional conflict (Zimmerman).

The next line of the play, "Saint Therese half in and half out of doors" (Stein, *Four Saints* 21), suggests the time of her novitiate in the convent before taking Holy Orders as a Carmelite nun. This line is followed by:

> Saint Ignatius is not there. Saint Ignatius is staying where. Never heard them speak speak of it.
> Saint Ignatius silent motive not hidden.
> Saint Therese silent. They were never beset.
> Come one come one. (Stein, *Four Saints* 21-22)

The words "Saint Ignatius is not there," the proximity of the two saints' names and the phrase "they were never beset" all suggest the fact that Ignatius and Therese never met,

though they were contemporaries and many significant church and order leaders, including Jesuits, consulted on the case of Therese's terrible visions and confessions.

Therese's life was "stormy" in general, with her visions, sickness and self-doubt, her disputes with the Pope's representatives, and the severe austerities of the Carmelite order. Her spiritual biographies relentlessly focus on her inner spiritual life. No other saint could so definitely be devoted to "inner realities" as Therese of Avila. In light of Stein's claim in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* that poetry and prose "should consist of an exact reproduction of either an outer or inner reality" (Stein, *Autobiography* 259), her choice of Therese of Avila and Ignatius Loyola are well suited to represent inner realities of Spanish sainthood: One of Therese's most famous books is *The Interior Castle* and St. Ignatius's is about Spiritual Exercises of meditation and prayer. Being so devoted to the inner life of mental visions and the mystical marriage, Therese is not a saint particularly linked to concerns abroad—even the several convents she started were all located in central and southern Spain. When Stein writes "If it were possible to kill five thousand chinamen by pressing a button would it be done./ Saint Therese not interested" (22), she characterizes Therese as concerned with domestic life, as opposed to life across the globe.

Later in Act One, Stein includes lines that refer to "The Mansions" of *The Interior Castle*: "How many saints can remember a house which was built before they can remember" (21). Since Therese's book maps out a spiritual path to eventual union with God through mansions of one's soul,[50] the "house that was built before they can

[50] These mansions are similar to stages or levels of consciousness in a relationship with God, something like the sefirot of the Jewish Kabbalah, existing within the soul of each human being.

remember" is one's own soul. *Interior Castles* begins, "I thought of the soul as resembling a castle formed of a single diamond or a very transparent crystal, and containing many rooms, just as in heaven there are many mansions" (St. Teresa 38-39). In Act II Scene XI, the saints ask, "How many windows and doors and floors are there in it" (43). These allusions to Therese's use of metaphors for the human soul exemplify the impressionistic way Stein includes biographical material to depict St. Therese in the opera—not in a cohesive narrative, but in a spattering of references that depict the saint as she exists for Stein, in the artifacts of her life.

In similarly abstracted impressions, Act II—or the region of the libretto in which Act II is included—presents words that recount a fragmented "history" of Saint Ignatius in lines such as "Saint Ignatius might be very well adapted to plans and a distance," which indicates his days as a soldier and pilgrim to the Holy Land. The line "Was Saint Ignatius able to tell the difference between palms and Eucalyptus trees" (32-33) refers to his longing to go to the Holy Land (where date palms grow) though he was forced to return to Barcelona (where Eucalyptus grow). Stein implies his life in Barcelona when she contrasts Ignatius and Therese, claiming, "There is a difference between Barcelona and Avila" (50).

In Act II Scene V, the saints proliferate—rather than concerning only Saints Therese and Ignatius, the libretto opens up to the voices of many saints. The tableaux seem to break down at this point, becoming more frenzied with lines such as "There are as many saints as there are in it" (36), "There are many saints" (43), and, in Scene Eight, "All Saints. All Saints At All Saints./ All Saints. Any and all Saints." The libretto moves in and out of representations of individual saints, to moments where the number of saints

grows and becomes unclear. Some saints are named in the cast that do not have specific speaking parts in the libretto. Other saints are named in the text of the libretto but are not in the cast.

If Stein's saints represent the existence of a large and unclear number of saints as one encounters on the exterior of a gothic cathedral, they might be depicted metaphorically as pigeons or magpies, appearing singly and then followed by a number of other saints, moving around in the environment, some identified, some just "saints." They move about as pendants on chains around people's necks, sit on windowsills as porcelain figures,[51] and stand out as statues against the sky on church facades, like Stein described the magpies doing in Avila. She once wrote:

> Magpies are in the landscape that is they are in the sky of a landscape, they are black and white and they are in the landscape in Bilignin and in Spain, especially in Avila.
>
> When they are in the sky they do something I have never seen any other bird do they hold themselves up and down look flat against the sky.
>
> A very famous French inventor of things that have to do with stabilisation in aviation told me that what I told him magpies did could not be done by any bird but anyway whether the magpies at Avila do do it or do not at least they look as if they do do it. They look exactly like the birds in the Annunciation pictures the bird which is the Holy Ghost and rests flat against the sky very high. (Stein, "Plays" 40)

Flat against the sky, the birds look like art, just as the saints are represented in art all over Spain. Sometimes they are named, as many of the saints in the opera, and sometimes they are unrecognizable or misrecognized by passers by.

Several of the saints in the cast are not canonized saints. For instance, one of the main saints, St. Chavez, is not a Catholic saint. Besides there being no St. Chavez on

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[51] Stein credits a porcelain figure in a window with making St. Ignatius "real" for her (Holbrook and Dilworth 9).

the list of canonized Catholic saints, saints are generally referred to by their first or Christian[52] names (like Therese and Ignatius), while Chavez is a surname. There are many other noncanonized saints in the play. Saints "Settlement," "Settle," and "Electra" join Chavez as characters whose names suggest concepts or characters that are meant to sound to the audience like they might have been saints, but nobody can really remember. This vague amalgam of saints with real or fictional names mimics the sort of saint-storm one encounters when touring Spain. Every cathedral is filled with altars and statues, window pictures and artwork depicting unnamed saints, so why not Electra instead of Mary of Bethany or Settlement instead of Peter? If a saintly image reminds Stein of a mythological character or allegorical one, like "Good Deeds" in Everyman, why shouldn't Stein call her saints by those recognizable names in order to portray her consciousness of the saints more accurately? "In creating linguistic analogues of her saints, Stein has been able to render their essential natures, and that what happens on the stage is quite unimportant as long as the action that a director or scenarist evolves is somehow 'true' to the essence of the characters and their landscape" (Hoffman 82). Not only are the names unimportant, but "what happens on the stage" is also unimportant as long as it conveys Stein's conceived "essence" of saints.

Libretto vs. Production

Critical examination of Stein's libretto as a piece of literature may not be fully parsed from the music of Virgil Thomson because their collaboration began before the opera was written, and Stein was familiar with his music before she wrote it. The music is particularly evocative of several religious genres including chants, hymns, spirituals,

[52] The name given to them at baptism

and chimes (Durham 46), lending the opera multiple dimensions of religiosity, paralleling the multiple saints and perspectives of Stein's libretto. The operatic form fit Stein's unique writing style, as repetition in operatic librettos is par for the course: characters sing over and over about their love or pain in scene-spanning crescendos. Scenes in which an exclamation is repeated over and over appear throughout classical opera, as repeated words and phrases appear throughout Stein's body of work. Stein's impressionistic, non-narrative style works well in opera because most operagoers are used to hearing librettos in foreign languages they did not understand (and there were no translations projected over the stage at that time!). Stein's libretto in English actually may seem more comprehensible to American audiences than librettos of Strauss's operas. While the music and words cannot be wholly separated for critical purposes, they can, however, be separated from Thomson's choice of a black cast, Stettheimer's ornate cellophane set, and Grosser's scenario in which "saints were seen chatting, picnicking, marching in a processional, and painting giant Easter eggs" (Webb 449). These were added for the production some four and five years after the libretto and music were composed, and have been successfully reconceived for later productions. A mixture of Thomson's desire to represent the saints as primitive and imbued with the pure, naïve sincerity associated with saints at the turn of the century (Lears 151-152) and the prejudiced, childlike representation of African Americans in popular film and stage productions of the time influenced Thomson's choice to feature only black performers. Comments by Thomson as well as many critics commended the choice, claiming that no other singers could have performed the opera so well:

> They moved, sang and spoke with alacrity, took on roles without self-consciousness, as if they were the saints they said they were. I often marveled at

> the miracle where-by slavery (and some crossbreeding) had turned them into Christians of an earlier stamp than ours, not analytical or self pitying or romantic in the nineteenth-century sense, but robust, outgoing, and even in disaster, sustained by inner joy." (Thomson 239)

Though the sets and casting choices effectively sensationalized the opera, they were not Stein's, and she explains that it was not a choice she had in mind as she composed the libretto (Durham 40).

Understanding at least a portion of Stein's concept of landscape theater helps one understand Stein's sense of saints, because the static scenes convey the saints as permanent (or at least long-term) fixtures, like houses, trees, and mountains in a landscape. The static moments she establishes by conveying her perception of saints from multiple perspectives mimics the saints' permanent existence in the glorified state. There is no progressive character development because the saints are already perfected entities. Though some of the tableaux do relate to moments in the lives of Saint Therese and Saint Ignatius, these scenes are presented by the already-glorified saints, themselves. Thomson separated Saint Therese into two different speakers, Therese I and Therese II, possibly because there are so many potential lines for the character, but also because there are two separate temporal spaces in the play: one in which saints congregate and share moments of their human lives, and one that depicts moments from Saint Therese's and Saint Ignatius's human lives. This split is exemplified just after the Prologue in which saints in heaven "had intended if it were a pleasant day to go to the country" (16). The following Act depicts the life of Saint Therese (in the sixteenth century) "in a storm at Avila," where "there can be rain and warm snow" (21). While acknowledging different temporal spaces provides some clarity about the relationship of one portion of the opera to the next, it does nothing to solve the central question of *place* in this play.

Without any recognizable stage directions, the question looms: "Where is this play taking place?"

The Place of the Play

If the Cubist style of prose allows Stein to provide an accurate representation of her own perception of saints, it also allows her to achieve congruence between their depiction onstage and their reception by the audience.

> ….at the theater there is the curtain and the curtain already makes one feel that one is not going to have the same tempo as the thing that is there behind the curtain…nervousness consists in needing to go faster or to go slower so as to get together. It is that that makes anybody feel nervous. (Stein, "Plays" XXX)

A nervousness is caused by the time that elapses between the portrayal onstage and the experience of the audience in front of the stage. By depicting static scenes with which the audience has no need of "keeping up," Stein attempts to alleviate the audience's nervousness (Holbrook & Dilworth 11). She claims that the movement in the landscape of *Four Saints* "was like a movement in and out with which anybody looking on can keep time" (Stein, "Plays" LI). Repetition allows for the audience to perceive the wholeness of the images of saintliness presented in each scene, thus the audience is able to perceive the wholeness of the landscape throughout the drama.

When Stein presents her opera in static scenes, she prevents the audience from becoming bored with stories that "everyone knows" (Stein, "Plays" XLIV). Stein claims that "dramas go on all the time, and everybody knows them, so why tell another one? There is always a story going on" (Stein, "Plays" XLIV). "Story is not the thing," instead, what excites her is "landscape not moving but always in relation, the trees to the hills the hills to the fields the trees to each other any piece of it to any sky and then any detail to

any other detail" (Holbrook & Dilworth 11). Thus, Stein wrote her libretto about saints as a landscape.

The lack of narrative coherence prevents the audience from imagining a place in which the action of the opera happens. When Stein writes about stories, she notes that people know so many stories that they are hard to distinguish from one another. The familiarity of the audience with narrative serves only to increase their "nervousness," which results from the audience's awareness of what will happen before it happens onstage. If the audience experiences the scenes as they are acted, then there is greater congruence between the enactment onstage and the perception of the audience. With no clear narrative, the audience cannot establish itself in an imaginary place other than the theater; thus, it is free to experience the saints in the present moment and the present place. There is no incongruence between the audience and the place of the play itself, both of which are in the theater.

Conversely, the saints Stein encountered in Spain are displaced into the theater. Stein's audience is not asked to imagine the stage as a place in Spain, but only to see a stage in a theater. This incongruence between subject and performance fulfills Theodor Adorno's demand for "contradiction" in meaningful opera.

> If there is to be any meaning to opera at all, if it is more than a mere agglomerate…then that meaning is to be sought in contradiction itself, rather than in vainly seeking to do away with contradiction in the name of an all too seamless aesthetic unity, the kind that flourishes drearily under the name symbolic." (Adorno in Zamansky 723)

A meaningful experience of saints in Stein's opera must not force the audience into the pretense of a symbolic Spain in the space of the stage the way Shaw requires his audience to imagine Rouen. Rather, Stein brings her experience of saints into the space of the New York theater.

Throughout the libretto, Stein points out the construction of the opera and its seams. Act One contains four Scene IIIs and many Scene Vs. Grosser staged these scene changes by having a "saint" carry a card with the name of the act or scene across the stage. The script contains dialogue that includes information about the play itself. For instance, "A scene and withers./ Scene three and scene two" (29), "They make this an act One" (30) and "This is a scene in which this is seen" (30). The libretto is self aware, asking itself, "How many acts are there in it./ How many saints in all" (54)—a significant question both because the title indicates *Four Saints in Three Acts*, while the actuality has been difficult to count.[53] What seems more significant is that the act and scene titles work to remind the audience they are in a theater. There is no immersion in the place of an imagined narrative. Instead, there are overt signs that acts and scenes are taking place onstage.

The lack of imagined place in the opera mimics the ritual space of the Catholic Mass. When a communicant attends Mass, he or she is not asked to imagine that the sanctuary is an upstairs room in Jerusalem where the last supper took place. Rather, the priest clearly explains that he is following Christ's direction to "do this in memory of me" when he raises the host and cup in the climactic moments of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The body of Christ is then incarnated there through the transubstantiation and distributed to the communicants directly, without distance or narrative or symbolism. Similarly, Stein hopes her opera will directly convey "what happened without telling

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[53] Ryan claims there are seven acts in the opera (92), but this is only true if one counts the acts by their announcement: Act One, Repeat Act One, Act Two, Act One, Act II, Act III and Act IV. There are obviously many different ways to count the acts. For instance, all of the acts are either an act one, two, three or four, numbered in various ways. So one might say there are actually only four acts. It is hard to imagine, however, how the opera might have only three, as the title suggests.

stories so that the essence of what happened would be…what made what happened be what it was" (Stein, "Plays" XLVI). She attempts to distribute her experience of saints directly to her audience, as communion to parishioners. The medieval history of saints' plays as derived from liturgical drama looms in this aspect of Stein's opera, but instead of bringing a sacredness to the opera, the opera points to the construction of the Mass as a series of scenes and acts.

Evidence that the saints are in a type of sanctuary or altar space exists in the libretto and in Stettheimer's sets for the opera's first run. Florine Stettheimer attempted to mimic the ornate aesthetic of Latin altars in her sets (Durham 49). The cellophane drapery and white, lacey taffeta costumes provided an aesthetic that might mimic images of heaven, with saints floating on clouds before pearly gates. Lines in the libretto describe one of the scenes as a Mass: "remembered as new," "it is very nearly ended with bread," and "when this you see remember me" evoke lines in the Liturgy of the Eucharist (Holbrook & Dilworth 10). Toward the end of the play, "As Ignatius and Therese come together, a large golden chalice appears with, above it, a golden circle evoking the consecrated host" (Holbrook & Dilworth 10). By using language and sets that echo the Mass, Stein and Thomson acknowledge the origin of medieval drama in the liturgy of the Mass.

What Made What Happened Be What It Was

According to Stein, this opera conveys "what made what happened be what it was" (Stein, "Plays" XLVI). In order to demythologize saints, she depicts them, in impressions and metaphors, as works of art: They are the perceptions of an artist, transported in essence to the stage and distributed to the audience. The saints Stein

conveys exist in legend, in hagiography, in statues and paintings, in jewelry, and as characters in books, plays, and operas. Presenting saints as the statues and legends in which they exist accomplishes the task she and Thomson originally considered: demythologizing the mythological subject of classical Italian opera. Pointing to themselves over and over again as speaking within a composition, the saints in the opera are as aware as anyone that they are characters in an opera. Discussing the opera as a landscape, and the saints as objects in the landscape, Stein herself overtly claims over and over that her saints are the work of an artist. And yet the very clarity of these claims seems to obscure their veracity. In the end, we may find, as Carl Van Vechten writes in his introduction to the libretto, that, "if appreciation of the text of Miss Stein is not instinctive with a person he never acquires it" (Vechten 9). Not everyone who sees *Four Saints in Three Acts* will come away with a clear picture of what saints are and do, but they will be aware of a constructed work of art that has conveyed the saints as fragments of historical narrative. And this is Stein's uncovering. If Eliot reveals St. Thomas as a complex human being who struggles with the same agonizing dilemma with which all humans are faced, and Shaw reveals an intelligent, forward-thinking heretic in Joan of Arc, Stein reveals saints as artistic constructs of history, ritual, and drama. Shaw, Eliot, and Stein all refute the notion that saints inherited a childlike sincerity through naïveté or simpler times. They depict saints of significant conviction, who follow what they see as the will of God, whether that path is easy or difficult.

Employing William James's understanding of religion as manifesting most significantly in personal experience, they each expose an individual sense of saintliness, based on their own experience and on the saints' own experiences. Shaw, Eliot, and Stein

draft concepts of saintliness, regardless of Catholic canonization, which encompass an ability to see truth, an ability to choose God's will over man's, and a prolific existence in artwork that inspires faith. The individuality of these modern saints' plays and the saints they depict is enhanced by an acknowledgement of their existence within a tradition—whether that be Joan of Arc dramas, religious and liturgical drama, or Italian opera. Oppressed as the world was in the 1930s with the homogenizing political forces of fascism and communism, it is no surprise that British and American artists would strive to reveal the worth of the individual, whether that individual was a heretic, a saint, or an artist. And no platform provided a better jumping-off point than the centuries of tradition of medieval saints' plays. After all, without a whole to reference, it is impossible to distinguish the individual. Thus, to reveal any new perspective on a religious belief, one had to recognize, as Durkheim explained it, the single moral community in which the belief originally existed. The authors of these modern saints' plays use the traditions of that moral community as a pool from which to draw out and redefine saints.

EPILOGUE

QUIET RENAISSANCE

The second half of the twentieth century saw an even greater religious ambivalence in its array of saints' plays than the first. Plays and screenplays defending the sacred virtue of the saints contrasted with plays and films exposing secular motivation and absurdity. In 1951, E. Martin Browne, director of Eliot's *The Rock* and *Murder in the Cathedral*, directed the hugely successful revival of the York Corpus Christi cycle during the York Festival of the Arts, a production that would play every three or four years until the end of the millennium. Soon after, in 1955, an English translation of Jean Anouilh's *The Lark* opened on Broadway, bringing Anouilh's skeptical version of the Joan of Arc story to New York. Anouilh's second modern saint's play, *Becket*, won four Tony awards in its English translation, including best play of 1960, and the film adaptation won two Golden Globes and an Oscar in 1965. Luc Besson's 1999 film *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc* continued the skeptical representation of the maid in the arena of blockbuster films. Although these skeptical portrayals of saintliness remain the public stars of modern saints' plays in the late twentieth century, their numbers pale in comparison to the vast array of films depicting the lives of Catholic saints produced by such companies as Ignatius Press and the Catholic Network EWTN. The bifurcation of secular public and religious private spheres that developed during the twentieth century, together with the greater personalization of media technology (e.g., VHS and DVD home

video), has moved the genre of modern saints' plays largely into the private space of people's homes and local church communities.

America's Ambivalence

Because the film industry in the US so overwhelms that of the rest of the world, and because America's ambivalence over religion is more extreme than current-day England's, late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century religious drama and film in English finds more popularity and significance in the US than in England. On Broadway and in popular film, saints have joined the ranks of superheroes whose extraordinariness has been enhanced for the thrill of huge audiences. These saints suffer an idealization that fictionalizes them, alienating them from the human world, and often giving them a reputation no reality could live up to. Superheroes' appearances in film have grown more and more extreme: Spiderman swings higher and faster than ever before; Batman's car can fly, shoot, float, change appearance, *and* drive. In line with these superheroes, Joan of Arc can fight on-screen in full armor with no helmet, thrusting her thirty-pound silver and steel sword into men three times her size while carrying a banner and riding a white horse or scaling a wall.

Luc Besson's 1999 film *The Messenger* employs Milla Jovovich as a Joan engulfed in the residual power and otherworldliness of the *Fifth Element*, in which, just two years earlier, she played the perfect being whose body saves the world from annihilation. Astonishingly graphic violence, extravagant costumes, and sweeping takes surround this Joan with a grandeur that enhances the superiority of her heroism. Jovovich's performance manages to combine the stunned face of Falconetti (*La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc,* 1928) and the quick-witted defiance of Shaw's superwoman. All the

while, a character playing Joan's conscience calls into question the veracity of her religious claims, suggesting that her rage over her sister's murder mixed with her guilt for surviving the British-led Burgundian attack might lie behind her vigor in fighting the English.

For all the superhero quality of the saint in *The Messenger*, which grossed over $65 million, it would seem that in order to gain popularity in the public sphere of the US film industry, Joan's religiosity had to be discredited. Joan of Arc works well as the quintessential twentieth-century saint precisely because her "visions" serve those who wish to prove her saintliness as well as those who wish to prove her insanity. The enigmatic ambivalence surrounding Joan's inspiration mirrors the religious ambivalence of postmodern America. Increasing diversity and political divisiveness enmeshed in an ever faster-paced technological development served to increase the secularity of the academy, journalism, art, theater, and film throughout the twentieth century. These changes occurred while a strong majority of Americans—83.1% in the Pew Survey of 2007 (Pew Forum)—identified themselves as religious.

Skeptical Scripts

At the end of the twentieth century, positively portraying religious figures while simultaneously questioning the veracity of their faith was not new to modern saints' plays. Shaw plainly states the nonreligious nature of his Joan's voices in the Preface to *Saint Joan*: "That the voices and visions were illusory, and their wisdom all Joan's own, is shewn by the occasions on which they failed her" (Shaw, *Saint Joan*, "Failures of the Voices"). Her death, therefore, becomes Shaw's proof that the voices who promised to save her merely reflected Joan's own wishful thinking, not the truth of God.

In 1955, French playwright Jean Anouilh's *The Lark*, in English translation, produced a similar Joan: staunchly faithful to her voices through tragic circumstances. However, Anouilh's play, sobered by a second world war, doubts the virtue of any of its characters but Joan, whose tragic faithfulness and inescapable death rings more pitiful than valiant. The script is painfully aware of itself as a play rather than either a mythic or realistic portrayal of Joan. Part One begins:

> WARWICK. Well, now; is everyone here? If so, let's have the trial and be done with it. The sooner she is found guilty and hanged, the better for all concerned.
> CAUCHON. But, my lord, before we do that we have the whole story to play: Domremy, the Voices, Vaucouleurs, Chinon, the Coronation.
> WARWICK. Theatrical poppycock! You can tell that story to the children:… (Anouilh, *Lark* 1)

If the beginning of the play recognizes itself inevitably as theatrical poppycock, the end of the play recognizes its own mistake in depicting the political machinations that brought about Joan's fiery death. In the final speech, Cauchon realizes they forgot to act out the coronation. He concedes that Joan will not be remembered in her trial and death but, instead, as a lark who rose above men to crown Charles and liberate France by God's hand.

> ...the real end of Joan's story, the end which will never come to an end, which they will always tell, long after they have forgotten our names or confused them all together: it isn't the painful and miserable end of the cornered animal caught at Rouen: but the lark singing in the open sky. Joan at Rheims in all her glory. The true end of the story is a kind of joy. Joan of Arc: a story which ends happily. (Anouilh, *Lark* 103)

Anouilh never claims to know the facts in Joan's story as Shaw did thirty years earlier. "Children, even when they are growing older, are allowed to make a bunch of daisies or play at imitating bird-song, even if they know nothing about botany or ornithology. That is just about what I have done" (Anouilh, *Lark*, "Note"). His script makes clear the fact

that the story he is telling is just that—a story. And according to him, it is one with a happy ending, with Joan crowned a saint and martyr, even as Charles was crowned at Rheims. He refers to her unsolvable "enigma" in the introductory note, which can only mean the problem of her voices, and the question of their provenance. His perpetual skepticism about the origin of her voices shows throughout the play in comments of the characters and the movement of the plot.

The popular revivals of festivals producing saints' plays and cycle dramas in England rely on local medieval history for their significance to the community. With no medieval history and little Catholic history on which to base revivals or community festivals, new saints' plays in the US passed largely into cinema in the latter twentieth century. Many of the plays referred to in this study were adapted for film, including Wilde's *Salome*, Shaw's *Saint* Joan, and Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*. In 1967, Fred Zinnemann's narrative of the martyrdom of Thomas Moore, *A Man for All Seasons*, won the Oscar for Best Picture, an award that Peter Glenville's version of Anouilh's *Becket* narrowly lost in 1965. So began America's love affair with films depicting Henry VIII and his court.

If Moore's commitment to Rome in *A Man for All Seasons* put into relief the enthralling villainy of Henry VIII, so Glenville's Thomas made a tragic star of Henry II. In Anouilh's play (and Glenville's film), the king is undoubtedly the star of the show. His penitent submission to flagellation and a broken heart deliver the tragedy that Becket's proud faith cannot. Thomas's desperate final words to God, "Your honour is a terrible burden! …Poor Henry" (Anouilh, *Becket* 109), pale beside Henry's invigorating rage against Thomas's assassins. Henry steals the proverbial mantle of God's honor in his

final speech: “Our justice will find them, My Lord. I’m putting you in charge of the independent inquiry. Let no one doubt our royal determination to defend God’s honour and the memory of our friend” (Anouilh, *Becket* 110). He makes himself virtuous by claiming the burden of judging the very men he sent to kill his beloved friend.

The successful film version of *Becket* includes the strong racial component of Anouilh’s script. Making Thomas a member of the Saxon race insulted for his heritage by nearly every member of the cast, Anouilh depicts an oppressed race, overpowered by the conquering Normans. Thomas and the “little Saxon” monk, who dies dreaming of defending him from the Norman Knights, act as a metaphor for France’s subjugation by Germany in WWII. Given the popularity of *Murder in the Cathedral* in postwar Germany (Däumer), the metaphor might extend to the oppression of Jews in the war as well. The tragic speeches of the king and the racial component of the script displace the focus on Thomas as singly devoted to God, suggesting that his hostility toward Henry derives from his need to vindicate the Saxons rather than support God’s honor. In this way, Anouilh’s skepticism of Thomas’s motivations parallels Besson’s skepticism of Joan’s motivations.

After dramatizing Henry and Becket’s drunken cavorting and womanizing, Anouilh’s play focuses on the conflict between them over the Constitutions of Clarendon, a political controversy regarding the legality of trying priests for murder in ecclesiastic courts. The 1964 film version alters the conflict to that of the excommunication of Lord Gilbert, accused of ordering the murder of an accused priest. The film focuses on the palpable actions of murder and excommunication though Anouilh’s script foregrounds the theoretical political argument between Henry and Thomas. The result in the play is

an alteration of Thomas's aims in bearing the honor of God—it seems composed of preserving the rights of ecclesiastic courts and recouping the taxes he argued to take from the Church when he was Chancellor. The fact that in the final speech Henry dons the honor of God in capturing those who killed Thomas, a command he all but gave, changes the audience's estimation of that honor. Although Thomas speaks in absolutes about his faith, his actions amount to a political and financial war against the monarchy he once defended. T.S. Eliot's limiting *Murder in the Cathedral* to the spiritual and psychological struggle of Becket's martyrdom allows him to present the holiness of the saint whereas Anouilh's play diverts focus from that to the debauched behavior before his conversion and to the political significance of Thomas's actions. In presenting skeptical screenplays about saints in wide distribution, Hollywood films have furthered the privatization of religion in a country concerned with maintaining equality in a diverse public space stabilized by secularity.

The Democratization of Heroes and Saints

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the US witnessed a progressive amplification in the use of the term "hero." Beginning with the firemen, police, and other volunteers who helped in the aftermath of 9/11, an effort by the administration of George W. Bush, Jr., to acknowledge the heroism of those who pledge to help their country or community was launched. The recognition of the heroism of soldiers progressively bled into a national discursive use of the word to acknowledge those who face any potential threat or make any large contribution to a community's welfare. This effort gave a positive moral significance not only to voluntarily signing up to fight in a controversial war but to anyone willing to go above and beyond ordinary reactions: "If you want to be

a modern day hero, you don't need a white horse, a suit of armor, a Herculean physique or even a square jaw line; all you need is the courage to go 'above and beyond' to help your fellow man or woman when the pressure is on" (Bacon). The evolving use of the term amounts to a democratization of heroism that gave everyone the opportunity to choose to be a hero.

This democratization of heroism echoes the earlier democratization of sainthood in the sixteenth century by Martin Luther. Dismayed by the extra Biblical traditions of Roman Catholicism, Luther re-acquainted his followers with the early Christian definition of saints as God's faithful, in heaven and on Earth, in a commentary on 1 Peter:

> Now that the light of truth is shining, we see with utter clarity that Christ and the apostles designate as saints, not those who lead a celibate life, are abstemious, or who perform other works that give the appearance of brilliance or grandeur, but those who, being called by the Gospel and baptized, believe that they have been sanctified and cleansed by the blood of Christ. Thus whenever Paul writes to Christians, he calls them saints, sons and heirs of God, etc. Therefore saints are all those who believe in Christ, whether men or women, slaves or free (Luther's Works 27:81-82). (Bucher "Who Are the Saints?" para. 11)

Luther's conviction that baptism and belief in the power of salvation through Christ makes one a saint disrupted the centuries-old tradition of venerating canonized saints in the Catholic Church. Although the English Reformation experienced ambivalent opinions of this teaching, the Puritan settlers of the US often called themselves "saints," as does the church begun in 1830 by Joseph Smith, called the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

This concept of egalitarianism free of the oppressive hierarchical systems of Europe, both religious and governmental, saturates the founding documents of the US. Such a sense of democratization filled the Bush administration's effort to make heroes of

the common citizen, bringing a traditional morality, though a secular one, back to the attention of contemporary America.

Sainthood and John Paul II

While the Bush administration's achievement focused on the heroism of ordinary people in order to bring a sense of morality to public life, Pope John Paul II attempted to remind the world's population that extraordinary holiness existed in the twentieth century. His papacy oversaw an easing of requirements for beatification and canonization during his time as pope, resulting in more beatifications (1,338) and canonizations (482) than all previous popes combined (Allen para. 2). He reduced the number of miracles required for canonization and abolished the "Devil's Advocate," making the process simpler and less contentious. A papacy focused on canonization led to a populace of Catholics particularly interested in sainthood.

On April 8, 2005, four million people filled Rome to witness the funeral of Pope John Paul II (Noonan para. 21). A chant that erupted from the crowds became a slogan repeated at his beatification six years later: "Santo Subito," "Sainthood now!" (Donadio and Povoledo para. 22). And yet the fervor over making him a saint (now!) carries a mystifying air in the US. After a century suffused with a secularizing episteme, the concept of sainthood is more remote from Americans than ever. The early settling of the British colonies largely by Puritans determined a unique relationship between the US and sainthood, different from any country in Europe whose history includes the Crusades and overlaps the Holy Roman Empire, or any Spanish colony whose history became entwined with that Catholic empire's. No residue of a medieval cult of the saints exists here, nor

the memory of Catholic or Protestant martyrs sacrificed in religio-political battles on our own ground.

As distant as the zeal for canonizing John Paul seems in a US concerned deeply with the priestly sex scandals of the late twentieth century, John Paul's devotees in Europe are adamant that his spiritual gifts, opposition to Communism's atheism, and dedication to enhancing the personal spiritual life of Catholics around the globe destines him for sainthood. One miracle, required for beatification, has already been confirmed for John Paul: After praying to him, Sister Marie-Simon Pierre was cured of Parkinson's disease (Donadio & Povelo para. 3). Questions surrounding John Paul's impending canonization have spurred a discussion of the meaning of sainthood in the American media, aggravated by the priestly sex scandals exposed near the end of the last century. As skeptical of sainthood as the Hollywood film industry, the media discussions of sainthood tended to reassure audiences concerned that making a saint of this pope might indicate his perfection on earth. An article in *Newsweek* reported, "Sainthood, these [Church] officials say, means that despite whatever failures of judgment and foresight marred a pope's reign, he was nevertheless personally a holy man" (Allen para. 18). The *Wall Street Journal* asserted, "Saints are first of all human, and their lives are always flawed, full of contradictions, and marked by stark failures. Yet they are individuals of heroic virtue" (Noonan para. 26).

According to these twenty-first-century journalists, sainthood does not indicate that the person led a perfect life, but rather that holiness and heroic virtue outshined their weaknesses and failures. This popular understanding of sainthood diverges from the distanced, child-like sincerity of the perfected saint idealized in the late nineteenth

century. It echoes the more human saintliness of Eliot's protagonist, deeply flawed, but heroic in faithfulness. It also veers from the superman saint who must be martyred or devote her life to nursing lepers in order to qualify for sainthood. It moves toward the ubiquitous saintliness of ordinary, very good people, like the twenty-first-century American concept of heroism.

Home Video—The Quiet Renaissance of Modern Saints' Plays

Although the American popular media may have exercised a need to assure audiences that Catholic sainthood is not as extreme as Hollywood films purport, a quiet and private revolution in the distribution of Catholic dramas has occurred. A current day search[54] of Amazon.com's "Movies & TV" offerings for "Catholic Saints" reveals 174 DVD listings. This list includes many documentary films about the lives of Catholic saints such as St. Benedict of Nursia, St. Nicholas Owen, and St. Swithin Wells, but the majority of the first few pages of listings are narrative films telling the life stories of Catholic saints. Some of the more popular titles include *Saint Rita*, *In Her Footsteps: The Story of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha*, *Therese*, *Padre Pio: Miracle Man*, *Bhakita: From Slave to Saint*, *Francis and Clare*, *Saint Anthony*, *The Reluctant Saint*, *Maria Goretti*, and *Faustina*. These are just a few of the films made in the last fifty years offered by Amazon and more selective distributors such as Ignatius Press and the Catholic Network ETWN. Ignatius Press of San Francisco, CA, was started by a Jesuit Priest, Father Joseph Fessio, and named for St. Ignatius Loyola, whose aim is to "support the teachings of the Church" (Westmore para. 4). Their official website offers 33 DVDs about saints. One significant page of the company's official website encourages an "Ignatius Night at the

[54] Performed March 28, 2013

Movies": "We invite you to partner with Ignatius Press in bringing the saints and other holy people to life on the 'big screen' right in your church, school, or social hall!" (Ignatius Press). The concept involves sponsoring a night on which people will congregate to view a film distributed by Ignatius Press and have the opportunity to buy products offered to the sponsors at a reduced rate—thus functioning as a fundraiser for the group as well as an opportunity for the community to view a film together. While the press certainly has an interest in selling products, the concept is not limited to sales. Other websites encourage family "Catholic Movie Night" (Hoopes) and other small-group meetings to include watching religious films together as a community.

The communal aspect of these movie nights may not include the whole town or happen at a huge festival, but certainly they do mimic many aspects of the medieval mystery performances. The focus of these films celebrates the sanctity of saint's lives. They reinforce church teachings and edify the Catholic community in harmony with the values of the Church. They are dramatic films made in collaborations requiring large amounts of money and time just like the immense productions of medieval cycles. I want to claim here that the great privatization of religion in the twentieth-century combined with the home video technologies that have nearly bankrupted major motion picture theaters have produced a quiet renaissance in modern saints' plays. With the palpable ambivalence of a country filled with religious people who practice only in private while participating in a secular public sphere, it is no wonder that a bifurcation of drama would occur: faithful private drama and films vs. skeptical public drama and films.

The Future

Not all new saints' plays are written for film. In 2000 Johns Hopkins published a collection of short plays by Erik Ehn called *The Saint Plays*. Most of the sixteen pieces were first produced between 1988 and 1998, while a few have yet to be produced. Ehn describes his work as "exploded biography, or the means by which the self is overmastered by acts of the imagination, by acts of faith" (Ehn ix). The Table of Contents lists the titles of the plays with the saint referenced in parentheses: *Wholly Joan's (Joan of Arc),* and *The Freak (George)*. The text is often enigmatic and requires reflection; for instance, the final speech of Young Mary in *Tree of Hope, Keep Firm (Mary, the Annunciation)*: "I stay in the tree, the involved roots cracking stone. The ripening tree, tightening. Lifting the nest, tightening, ripe. Baby tree, rocking me, enscripting its space. I am Mary. I am Mary" (Ehn 106). Other pieces employ a scant allegory, such as in *Locus (John the Baptist)* in which John and Salome live together in a mobile home in Albuquerque where Salome prepares a cheerleader/majorette performance for her step-father. These plays contain a spiritual component, but they require study and contemplation if anything but an impression of religious mystery is to be conveyed. They are certainly very different from the narrative biopics of Ignatius Press, and certainly hold plenty of fodder for future study of modern (or postmodern) saints' plays.

With the nearly certain canonization of two celebrity saints in the next decade—John Paul II and Mother Theresa of Calcutta—global attention to saints and saintliness will surely increase. It is possible that the privatization of religion may be undone by a global "desecularization" (Berger 10), making the public sphere a safe place to profess religious understanding. Will wartime heroes become saints? Will we see Seal Team Six

as fulfilling a religious crusade or Islamic suicide bombers as holy martyrs? More likely our mass media's need for spectacle will require its own continued tradition of exposing the disgrace of the world's greatest celebrities, including popes and presidents, and the public sphere will continue to use secularity as a stabilizing mechanism in an atmosphere of ever growing diversity—religious or otherwise. Perhaps the region for an integration of religion and the public sphere will occur in cyberspace. Already, online religious communities and forums have emerged, making private belief into public conversation. Independent video and small production films fill You Tube and the blogosphere. Perhaps this will be the new venue for postmodern saints' plays, a platform where a global community will watch in wonder or jeer in the comment section, where people of varying virtues will be lauded, and the ever-present enemy will be booed off-stage (while secretly revered).

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